

**Name of Activity:-** Health Headlines Activity

**Type of Activity:** - Pairs/Group. Suitable for 11-15 year olds

**Learning points:-** Finding high quality, accurate information on the web can be very difficult. This is true of any topic, but health information has seen particular difficulties when it comes to people having access to the correct information. Many young people also use social media as a source of health information and this can be problematic. This activity looks at headlines that have appeared on a number of online resources on social media, the web and online newspapers. All are health stories that have appeared somewhere online.

## Part One

Fake News videos. Start with the information below (permission may need to be sought to broadcast videos- check terms and conditions)

- <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/anti-vaccine-vax-health-mmr-autism-fake-news-social-media-sally-davies-a8612061.html> Anti-vaccine movement spreading 'fake news' online and putting children at risk, England's top doctor warns
- <https://www.facebook.com/ABCScience/videos/how-to-spot-fake-health-news/1749994371713305/> How to spot fake health news. ABC Science
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pn7ZTTQIR9k> - Fact checking fake health and medical news on the internet (The Investigators with Diana Swain)

## Part Two

Give each group a set of headlines (**see resource pack**)

1. 'Dandelion weed can boost your immune system and cure cancer' – Facebook  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/fake-news-health-facebook-cruel-damaging-social-media-mike-adams-natural-health-ranger-conspiracy-a7498201.html>
2. 'Doctors kill 2,450 per cent more Americans than all gun-related deaths combined' – Natural News  
<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/doctors-kill-more-people-than-guns/>
3. 'Birth defects in boys caused by hairspray' - The Sun/Daily Mail  
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4281634/Birth-defect-boys-caused-hairspray.html> also see <https://www.nhs.uk/news/pregnancy-and-child/hairspray-and-birth-defects/> for a breakdown of the actual study which concludes '*Further research will need to provide firmer evidence on the effects of exposures to substances such as hairspray. A study such as this, which has design limitations and was not in a position to investigate the ingredients of hairsprays, does not provide proof that it is harmful in the first trimester*'
4. 'Nutella may cause cancer' – <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/nutella-does-it-cause-cancer-spread-chocolate-nut-italy-supermarkets-palm-oil-carcinogenic-risk-a7523851.html>

5. Federal Study Finds Marijuana 100 Times Less Toxic than Alcohol, Safer than Tobacco – Facebook  
<https://via.hypothes.is/https://web.archive.org/web/20180401034419/http://urhealthguide.com/federal-study-finds-marijuana-100x-less-toxic-alcohol-safer-tobacco/>  
  
Site explaining the bad science behind the original article above.  
<https://healthfeedback.org/evaluation/most-popular-health-article-2018-promoting-cannabis-safety-biased-and-misleading/>
6. World Health Organization officially declares bacon is as harmful as cigarettes, published by Truth Reporter – Online news <https://healthfeedback.org/claimreview/claim-that-the-world-health-organization-finds-bacon-as-harmful-as-cigarettes-is-inaccurate-and-misleading/>

Based on the headlines and source given for each, get pupils to:

- Talk about the headline and their first impressions
- How trustworthy does it seem?
- Does the source of the information give us any clues?
- Are we inclined to believe the headline?
- Can we find the same information in another place – why would that be important?

All of the headlines are examples of problematic reporting (all the links will give you a breakdown of the stories and the source). Some sources seem to be particular purveyors of fake health information and appear to have produced more than one misleading health story. Sites like these should be avoided. They may show a lack of:

- Accurate reporting
- Misleading headlines
- Attention grabbing headline /exaggerating the story to get attention
- Lack of basis in science
- Distorting scientific fact
- Trying to pursue of a particular political/religious/other viewpoint being disguised as health information

How may this affect our choice in our own healthcare? Talk about alternative ways to find accurate information? Is this through friends and family, the websites we looked at in previous activities/Dr/combination?

### Background Reading

1. Ritschel, Chelsea (2019) **Health articles shared on Facebook include false information, researchers say.** The Independent, 5<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019 [Online]. (Accessed October 2019)  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fake-news-health-facebook-study-medicine-nutrition-fact-credibility-a8764436.html>

Abstract: To uncover the validity and scientific accuracy of health stories published in 2018, researchers at Health Feedback, a network of scientists dedicated to reviewing media coverage of health and medical news, worked in collaboration with the Credibility Coalition to analyse the most popular health articles. The stories with the highest numbers of engagement, published by a variety of sources from well-known publications such as Huffington Post, CNN, and The Guardian to lifestyle blogs, showed a clear issue with misinformation and inaccuracy.

2. Matthews-Kind, Alex ( 2018) **Anti-vaccine movement spreading ‘fake news’ online and putting children at risk, England’s top doctor warns.** The Independent [Online] (Accessed October 2019) <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/anti-vaccine-vax-health-mmr-autism-fake-news-social-media-sally-davies-a8612061.html>

Abstract: England’s most senior doctor has warned that fake news myths pedalled on social media are stoking false fears about vaccinations putting children at risk

3. McFarlane, Jo ( 2018) **How fake medical news is SERIOUSLY damaging our health: From vaccines and heart pills to cancer drugs and diets, as experts report a rise in misinformation online, a special investigation tackles the dangerous myths threatening our health.** Mail on Sunday (Online) [Accessed March 2020] <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-6424819/How-fake-news-SERIOUSLY-damaging-health.html>
4. Waszak PM, Kasprzycka-Waszak W, Kubanek A. **The spread of medical fake news in social media—the pilot quantitative study.** Health policy and technology. 2018 Jun 1;7(2):115-8.
5. Fake News Collection - <https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/fake-news>