



COVID-19 misinformation and response in The Philippines



Melvin Sanicas, MD MSc MBA



A coronavirus outbreak is spreading quickly. Here's what you need to know.

Thousands have been sickened by a new coronavirus in more than a dozen countries, including the US.

By Julia Belluz | @juliaoftoronto | Updated Jan 29, 2020, 6:28am EST

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nCOV-2019 started to dominate the news in January 2020



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Dr Melvin Sanicas ✓

@Vaccinologist · [Follow](#)



Preliminary R_0 (number showing how contagious / transmissible a pathogen is) for [#Wuhan](#) [#nCoV2019](#) novel [#coronavirus](#): 1.4 - 2.5. Here are the figures for other diseases [#SARSVirus](#) [#MERS](#) & their case-fatality rates to put things in perspective [#新型冠状病毒](#) [#SciComm](#) [#globalhealth](#)

Disease	R_0^*	Case-fatality rate
Diphtheria	6 – 7	5 – 10%
Ebola	1.5 – 2.5	25 – 90 %
Seasonal flu	1 – 2	< 0.1 %
Measles	12 – 18	0.1 – 0.2 %
Mumps	4 – 7	0.01 %
Pertussis (whooping cough)	12 – 17	4%
Polio	5 – 7	5 – 10% (paralytic polio)
Rubella	5 – 7	3–6% (developing countries)
Smallpox	5 – 7	30% (variola major)
SARS coronavirus	3	9 – 16%
MERS coronavirus	<1	30 – 40%
2019 novel coronavirus	1.4 – 2.5**	4%**

* R_0 value does not take into account case-fatality rate. Ebola, with a small R_0 value, cause widespread panic because of the high case-fatality rate. Measles is very infectious but perceived as not dangerous (as deadly as Ebola) but we now know measles cause "immune amnesia" (i.e. erase immune memory from previous infections) **figures will change in the course of the outbreak || @Vaccinologist

11:11 PM · Jan 23, 2020





All vaccinated people will die within 2 years.
Nobel laureate Luc Montagnier has confirmed that there is no chance of survival for people who have received any form of the vaccine. In the shocking interview, the world's leading virologist stated bluntly: "There



Scientists and physicians who spread COVID-19 medical misinformation had a broad reach on social media.

The more ridiculous = the more viral (more reactions and shares)

Examples of misinformation in the Philippines

“SARS-CoV-2 is a type of rabies along with advice to not eat bats.”

“Fake cigarettes is a method of transmission of COVID-19.”

“Bananas can cure COVID-19.”

“Salt water steam (tuob) is a cure for COVID-19.”

“Boiled ginger is a cure for COVID-19.”

“Gargling warm water with salt would eliminate the virus.”

“COVID-19 vaccines will kill you in 2 days / 2 weeks / 2 months / 2 years.”

“COVID-19 mRNA vaccines will change your DNA / genes.”

“Ivermectin is fully approved by the Food and Drug Administration as a cure for COVID-19.”



COVID-19 INFODEMIC RESPONSE OVERVIEW IN THE PHILIPPINES

Coordination, resourcing and strategy

The Philippines' **COVID-19 infodemic response task force** is composed of various volunteers and representatives from national government agencies, development partners (such as WHO and UNICEF Philippines), media and public affairs representatives, and the academe, with the Department of Health (DOH) at the helm.

- The task force is in-charge of tracking, addressing, and managing all infodemic related to COVID-19.
- Resources for the management of misinformation and disinformation is lodged in the country's overall RCCE strategy for COVID-19 response.
- The Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill is the foremost policy in the country ensuring people's right to information on matters of public concern, thus supporting public access to health information.

01

Working relationships across society

- Apart from partner agencies both from governmental and non-governmental organizations, the DOH is also in **partnership with various social media companies** such as Facebook and Twitter to help manage the COVID-19 infodemic. These platforms have provided the DOH with online ad credits to help boost content that address mis/disinformation.
- DOH also collaborated with several online influencers—from celebrities to health experts—in helping share fact-checking content.

02

Integrated measurement, research and data analysis

- DOH worked with several PR consultants and partners from civil society organizations (CSOs) on **social media monitoring and community listening**. Such reports supplement the task force's research on rumors that need to be managed.
- Data sources include: online news, citizen posts, newspapers, TV and radio news, and community feedback through the DOH regional offices.
- The life cycle of rumors are closely monitored online in terms of reach, likes, shares, and overall traction until they die off.

03

Evidence-based interventions and implementation research

- The rumors are assessed based on two main criteria: **consequence** (e.g. rumor could cause harm, stop people from accessing services, cause conflict, etc.) and **virality** (e.g. shared at least 500 times and has crossed over from one social media platform to another, gotten the attention of local/national news, etc.) before deciding to release fact-check materials.
- Fact-check messages are sent to relevant technical and operation offices for vetting, before they are pretested among DOH staff of all levels for understandability and impact prior to release.
- Apart from social media, release of fact-checking materials are augmented via SMS, website, and the DOH's very own COVID-19 chatbot, KIRA.

04

Reporting and integration into decision-making

- Social media monitoring and community listening are conducted daily. The results are reported every morning the next day during the Department's editorial meeting with partners and PR experts.
- The reports are used in guiding which rumors to address and selecting what channel to utilize (e.g. social media, pressers, media forums, community interventions, or all).
- The policy, health regulation, and health services teams of the DOH is closely involved in infodemic management discussions so they could swiftly address through policies rumors that need legal interventions.
- The whole process is assisted by international partners such as USAID and WHO.



Infodemic management pre-COVID

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the infodemic management system is arbitrary; there are no criteria set in screening which mis/disinformation to address and interagency coordination on health rumor management is quite weak. Content-wise, however, the DOH has always been accurate and materials are thoroughly vetted by concerned offices.
- Community listening and social media monitoring are rarely conducted, hence some rumors fall through the cracks of infodemic management.

Infodemic management during COVID

- Since the COVID-19 situation erupted in the Philippines, infodemic management was paid more attention and regarded with higher importance as it sometimes draw the line between life and death.
- In fact, infodemic management became one of the four pillars of the DOH's foremost COVID-19 communications campaign dubbed as *BIDA Solusyon sa COVID-19* (Be the Solution to COVID-19).
- The Philippine government adopted a more systematic, coordinated, whole-of-government approach in addressing dis/misinformation on COVID-related issues. The DOH is now looking towards upscaling this to cover all health-related concerns.
- National government agencies, development partners, media and public affairs representatives, and the academe synergized and coordinated their efforts towards addressing mis/disinformation.
- As a result, a total of at least 57 fact-check materials on critical, urgent issues related to COVID-19 mis/disinformation were released by the Department as of writing. For more information, audiences are diverted to published policy documents and/or the DOH official website.
- For issues that require elaboration and educational reinforcements, subsequent explainer videos are produced. These typically highlight actionable points for the public to follow.
- All finished communication materials are cascaded to regional offices for localization and distribution on-ground.



Examples of how misinformation was addressed

A LAMIN ANG TOTOONG IMPORMASYON

FACT CHECK!

NAKAKAPATAY NG COVID-19 VIRUS ANG PAGLANGHAP NG STEAM NA MAY ASIN, LEMON, AT IBA PA (TUOB).

WALANG PAG-AARAL NA NAGSASABING KAYANG PATAYIN NG STEAM INHALATION ANG COVID-19 VIRUS.

FACTS:

- ✓ NAGPAPARAMI ANG PAGLANGHAP NG STEAM NG SECRETIONS O LIKIDO SA BIBIG AT ILONG NA MAAARING MAIPASA TUWING BABAHING O ULIBO.
- ✓ MAY POSIBILIDAD NA MAPASAMA ANG SINGAW NG VIRUS (AEROSILIZATION) NA MAAARING MAIKALAT SA IBA.
- ✓ MAARING MAGDULOT NG AKSIDENTE GAYA NG PAGKASUNOG AT PAGKALAPNOS NG BALAT.

REKOMENDASYON NG DOH: IWASAN ANG PAGGAWA NG TUOB O STEAM INHALATION. SUMANGGUNI SA MGA HEALTHCARE WORKERS SA NARARAPAT NA INTERBENSYON.

BIDA SOLUSYON SA COVID-19

f OfficialDOHgov @DOHgovph doh.gov.ph (02) 894-COVID / 1555

Is TUOB/SUOB (steam inhalation) a cure for COVID-19?

Salt water steam will not prevent you from catching COVID-19. Actually, extremely hot steam can be harmful, as there is a risk of burn injury.



To fight COVID-19, we need to be guided by science and evidence.

To date, there is no recommended treatment or vaccine to prevent or treat COVID-19. Until there is sufficient evidence, WHO cautions against recommending or administering unproven treatments to patients with COVID-19 or people self-medicating with them. Some specific treatments are under investigation, and will be tested through clinical trials. In launching the Solidarity Trial, WHO is helping to accelerate research and development efforts with a range of partners.



World Health Organization

#COVID19

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ONLINE FORUM
NOV. 26, FRIDAY, 2PM



GOV. FRANCIS ESCUDERO
Province of Sorsogon



DR. MELVIN SANICAS
Vaccine expert

COVID-19 VACCINES



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Consul Paulo Saret

Philippine Consulate General
Assistance to Nationals Section Head

APRIL 11, SUNDAY, 9PM
LIVE ON FACEBOOK



THE REAL DEAL ABOUT DELTA

The Real Deal About Delta answers the most frequently asked safety questions we have on the new, highly transmissible, and deadly COVID-19 Delta variant — keeping Filipinos informed on what they should know as well as the necessary precautions we need to take.

August 9, 2021 | 8:30 P.M.

Catch it live at The Philippine Star
and Philstar Life Facebook pages

- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Information Campaigns
- ✓ Trusted sources
- ✓ Mainstream and social media



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Member, Department of Health and
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Lessons learned from COVID-19 misinformation experience

