[Government cracks down on spread of false coronavirus information online](#)

Specialist units across government are working at pace to combat false and misleading narratives about coronavirus, ensuring the public has the right information to protect themselves and save lives.

The Rapid Response Unit, operating from within the Cabinet Office and No10, is tackling a range of harmful narratives online – from purported 'experts' issuing dangerous misinformation to criminal fraudsters running phishing scams.

Up to 70 incidents a week, often false narratives containing multiple misleading claims, are being identified and resolved. The successful 'Don't Feed the Beast' public information campaign will also relaunch next week, to empower people to question what they read online.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

> We need people to follow expert medical advice and stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. It is vital that this message hits home and that misinformation and disinformation which undermines it is knocked down quickly.
>
> We're working with social media companies, and I'll be pressing them this week for further action to stem the spread of falsehoods and rumours which could cost lives.

When false narratives are identified, the government's Rapid Response Unit coordinates with departments across Whitehall to deploy the appropriate response. This can include a direct rebuttal on social media, working with platforms to remove harmful content and ensuring public health campaigns are promoted through reliable sources.

The unit is one of the teams feeding into the wider Counter Disinformation Cell led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, made up of experts from across government and in the tech sector.

The Cell is engaging with social media platforms and with disinformation specialists from civil society and academia, to establish a comprehensive overview of the extent, scope and impact of disinformation related to coronavirus.

The Culture Secretary will be contacting social media companies this week to thank them for their good efforts to date, assess the progress made and discuss what other potential measures can be put in place to ensure accurate, honest information consistently reaches users of their platforms.

Penny Mordaunt, Paymaster General said:

> Holding your breath for ten seconds is not a test for coronavirus
> and gargling water for 15 seconds is not a cure — this is the kind
> of false advice we have seen coming from sources claiming to be
> medical experts.
>
> That is why government communicators are working in tandem with
> health bodies to promote official medical advice, rebut false
> narratives and clamp down on criminals seeking to exploit public
> concern during this pandemic.
>
> But the public can also help with this effort, so today we implore
> them to take some simple steps before sharing information online,
> such as always reading beyond the headline and scrutinising the
> source.

The public can help stop the spread of potentially dangerous or false stories
circulating online by following official government guidance — the 'SHARE'
checklist (see further information). This includes basic but essential advice
such as checking the source of a story and analysing the facts before
sharing.

Certain states routinely use disinformation as a policy tool, so the
government is also stepping up its efforts to share its assessments on
coronavirus disinformation with international partners. Working
collaboratively has already helped make the UK safer, providing ourselves and
our allies with a better understanding of how different techniques are used
as part of malicious information operations — and how to protect against
those techniques more effectively.

These measures follow recent advice from the National Cyber Security Centre,
which revealed a range of attacks being perpetrated online by cyber criminals
seeking to exploit coronavirus earlier this month.

This included guidance on how to spot and deal with suspicious emails related
to coronavirus, as well as mitigate and defend against malware and
ransomware.

Further information

To help the public spot false information the government is running the SHARE
checklist and Don't Feed The Beast campaign here. This gives the public five
easy steps to follow to identify whether information may be misleading:

- Source — make sure information comes from a trusted source
- Headline — always read beyond the headline
- Analyse — check the facts
- Retouched — does the image or video look as though it has been doctored?
- Error — look out for bad grammar and spelling