

U.S. PHYSICIANS: *Medical Misinformation* IS HARMING PATIENTS' HEALTH

FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL POLL OF PHYSICIANS & THE PUBLIC



Physicians and the American public consider medical misinformation a serious problem, and physicians agree that misinformation has already had a negative impact on patient treatment and outcomes, according to a national poll conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of the de Beaumont Foundation.

In the poll of 806 physicians and 2,210 other adults, 44% of physicians estimated that more than half of all COVID-19 information they see, read, or hear from patients is “medical misinformation.” And nearly three in four physicians said the spread of medical misinformation has negatively impacted both their ability to treat people for COVID-19 and patient outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Physicians are more united than the general public in their support of COVID-19 vaccines.** Across political parties, 92% of physicians agree that the vaccines are safe, and 91% agree they are effective, compared with 65% of the public who said they are safe and effective.
- **The extent and harm of misinformation is widespread.** Physicians said they consider misinformation a major problem; 44% said more than half the COVID-19 information they see, read, and hear from patients is medical misinformation, and 72% said it has made it harder to treat patients with COVID-19 and has harmed patient outcomes.
- **Misinformation is not just a COVID problem.** While misinformation about COVID-19 and COVID vaccines is a problem, more than two-thirds of physicians also said misinformation about weight loss, dietary supplements, mental health, and other vaccines is a problem.
- **Physicians support accountability and discipline for physicians who spread misinformation.** They are more

supportive of investigations and warnings for first offenses than they are of more serious actions for repeat offenses.

- **Physicians underestimate the trust people have in them.** Nearly 7 in 10 physicians (68%) said they think patient trust has decreased over the past two years. But among the general population, only 21% said their trust has decreased; 75% said their level of trust has increased or stayed about the same.

METHODOLOGY

On behalf of the de Beaumont Foundation, Morning Consult conducted an online national poll Dec. 9-19, 2022, among a sample of 806 U.S. physicians and Dec. 10-14, 2022, among 2,210 U.S. adults. Results from the full physician survey have a margin of error of +/- 3%, and results from the full adult sample have a margin of error of +/- 2%. Quotas were set on the physician survey based on census data, and the data among adults were weighted to approximate a representative sample of adults based on gender, age, race, educational attainment, and region.

Medical respondents were physicians who spend at least half their time performing direct patient care (time spent managing patients, including patient office visits, performing procedures, patient-related phone calls, follow-ups, etc.). The physician audience included primary care providers, acute care physicians, urgent care physicians, hospital physicians, and other types of physician specialists.

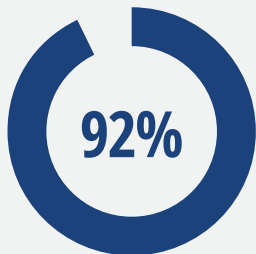
VACCINE EFFECTIVENESS AND SAFETY

While many Americans are divided over COVID-19 facts, physicians' professional identity outweighs their politics, with 92% saying the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and 91% saying the vaccines are effective. In fact, 71% said they strongly agree about their safety and 67% about their effectiveness. A small number of medical professionals are actively and intentionally spreading misinformation about COVID vaccines, but these results show that a large majority of physicians believe they are safe and effective.

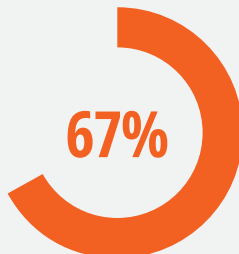
DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT COVID-19?

Percentage who said they somewhat or strongly agree

COVID-19 has killed more than a million people in the U.S.

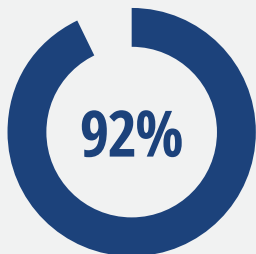


PHYSICIANS



PUBLIC

COVID-19 vaccines are safe.

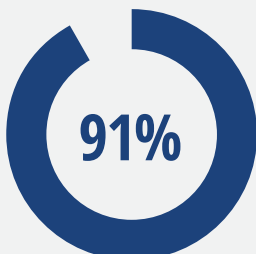


PHYSICIANS

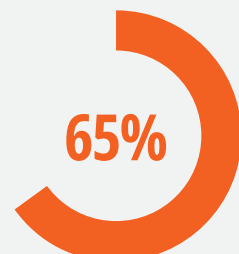


PUBLIC

COVID-19 vaccines are effective.



PHYSICIANS



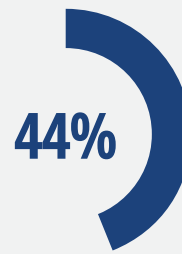
PUBLIC

THE EXTENT AND IMPACT OF MISINFORMATION

Nearly half of physicians (44%) and more than half of other adults (54%) estimate that 50% or more of all the information they see about COVID-19 is medical misinformation.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF INFORMATION ABOUT HEALTH AND MEDICINE THAT YOU SEE, READ, OR HEAR ABOUT COVID-19 WOULD YOU CONSIDER TO BE MEDICAL MISINFORMATION?

Percentage saying at least half of all information is misinformation



PHYSICIANS



PUBLIC

For both physicians and other adults, 38% estimate that 50% to 75% of the information they see is misinformation. However, 16% of the general population and 6% of physicians estimate it's as high as 76% to 100%.

Among physicians, those who work in urgent care/hospital settings are more likely to say they see a higher percentage of medical misinformation from their patients about COVID-19. Additionally, adults who identify as Republicans and those not vaccinated for COVID-19 are more likely to say they have seen a higher percentage of medical misinformation.

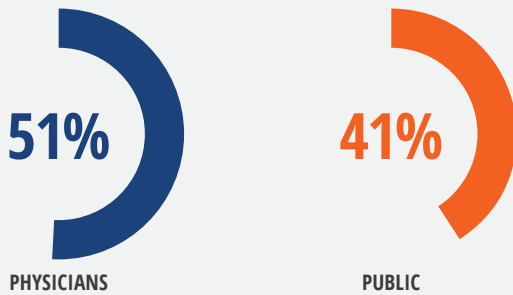
Nearly three in four physicians (72%) said that misinformation about COVID-19 made it harder to provide care for patients with COVID-19 and led to negative outcomes for those patients.

MISINFORMATION BY PHYSICIANS

Physicians were more likely than other adults to say physicians are responsible for both causing and combating misinformation. More than half of physicians (51%) said they consider the spread of medical misinformation by physicians a problem – even higher than the perception among the general population, 41% of whom said it's a problem.

HOW BIG A PROBLEM IS THE SPREAD OF MEDICAL MISINFORMATION BY PHYSICIANS?

Percentage saying a somewhat or very large problem

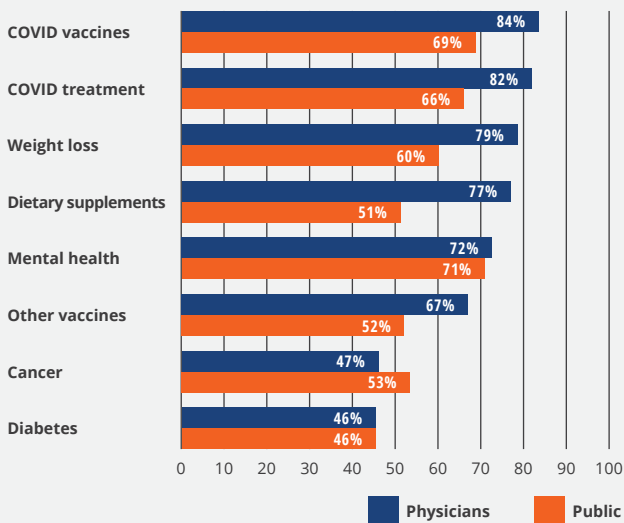


NOT JUST A COVID PROBLEM

The poll asked how big a problem misinformation is about COVID and non-COVID issues. More than 8 in 10 physicians said misinformation about COVID vaccines and treatment is a problem, and more than two-thirds said it's a problem for weight loss, dietary supplements, mental health, and other vaccines. Nearly half said misinformation about cancer and diabetes is a problem. Medical misinformation has a greater profile now because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but physicians saw it as a problem before the pandemic.

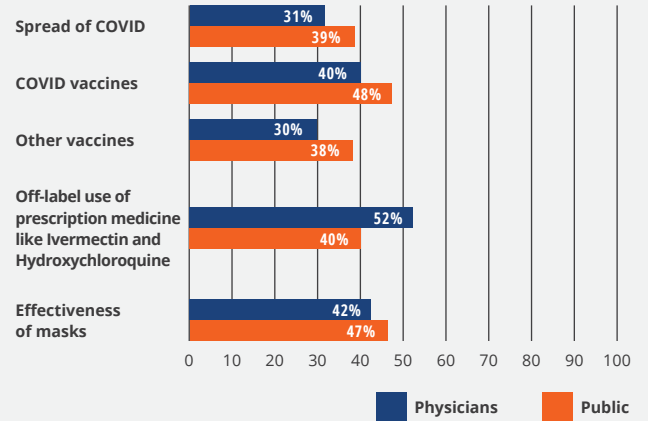
HOW MUCH OF A PROBLEM IS THE SPREAD OF MEDICAL MISINFORMATION ABOUT...?

Percentage saying a somewhat or very large problem



HOW RESPONSIBLE ARE PHYSICIANS FOR THE SPREAD OF MEDICAL MISINFORMATION ABOUT...?

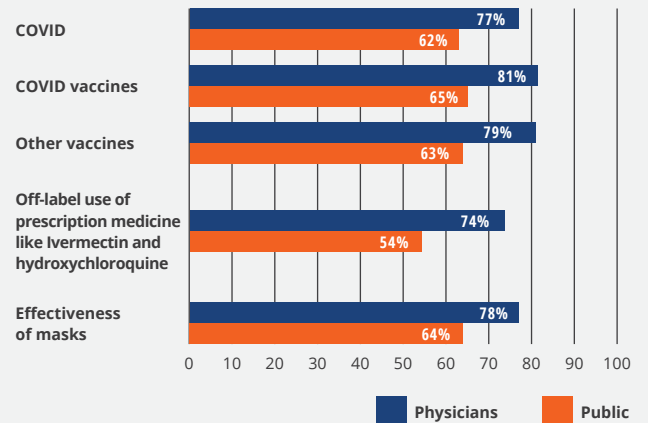
Percentage answering "somewhat" or "very" responsible



ACCOUNTABILITY AND DISCIPLINE

HOW RESPONSIBLE ARE PHYSICIANS FOR COMBATING THE SPREAD OF MEDICAL MISINFORMATION AMONG THEIR PATIENTS ABOUT...?

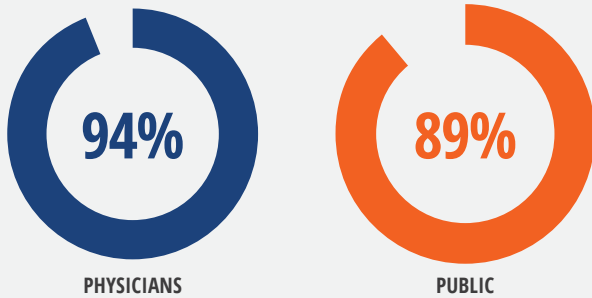
Percentage answering "somewhat" or "very" responsible



A majority of physicians said physicians who intentionally spread misinformation should be held accountable. More than three in four physicians (77%) said medical boards should discipline physicians for medical misinformation, but they are less supportive (65%) of passing laws that hold physicians accountable. A strong majority of physicians and adults think a physician's responsibility to share credible information with their patients outweighs their right to free speech or to intentionally spread medical misinformation.

PHYSICIANS DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO INTENTIONALLY SPREAD MISINFORMATION OR FALSE HEALTH INFORMATION TO PATIENTS.

Percentage who agreed



While physicians believe in accountability, they are more supportive of investigations and warnings for first offenses than they are of more serious actions for repeated offenses.

DO YOU SUPPORT OR OPPOSE THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS TO DISCIPLINE PHYSICIANS WHO INTENTIONALLY SPREAD MEDICAL MISINFORMATION TO PATIENTS? PHYSICIANS WHO INTENTIONALLY SPREAD MISINFORMATION SHOULD...

Percentage of physicians saying they somewhat or strongly support the action

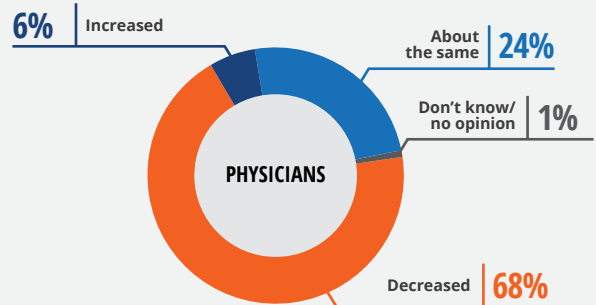


Most physicians think medical boards should review and discipline physicians who intentionally spread misinformation. Democratic physicians were more supportive than Republican physicians (98% vs. 76%). Among other adults, there was a smaller divide between Democrats and Republicans on this question (92% vs. 85%). Politicians who are taking action to [limit oversight by medical boards](#) are going against the will of their constituents, across parties.

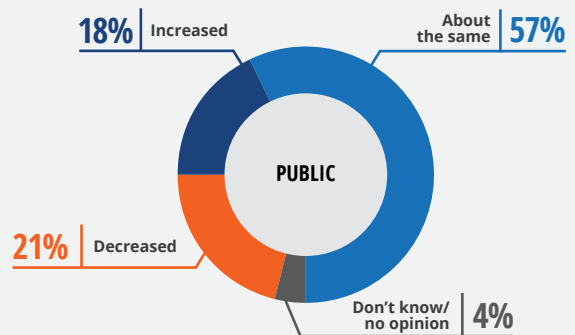
TRUST IN PHYSICIANS

The poll findings suggest that physicians perceive that patient trust has decreased over the past two years more than it actually has. Nearly 7 in 10 physicians (68%) said they think patient trust in physicians has decreased, but only 21% of the general population said their trust has decreased; a full 75% said their level of trust has either increased or stayed about the same.

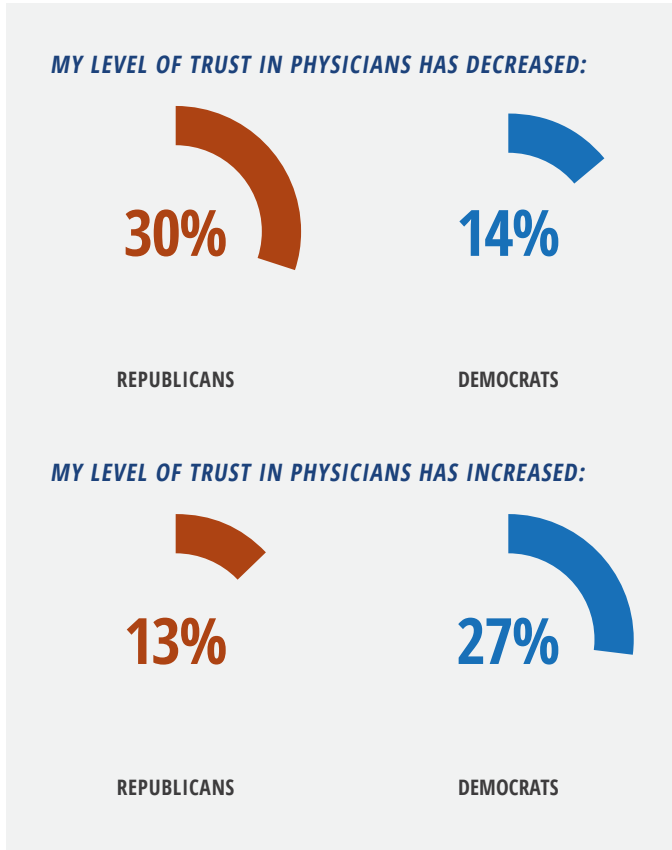
HOW HAS PATIENT TRUST IN PHYSICIANS CHANGED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS?



HAS YOUR TRUST IN PHYSICIANS CHANGED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS?



But among adults who are not vaccinated for COVID-19, 38% said their trust in physicians has decreased – more than any other group polled. And more than most of the other questions, there was a divide between Democrat and Republican respondents. Still, a similar percentage of Republicans (54%) and Democrats (57%) said their trust has stayed about the same.



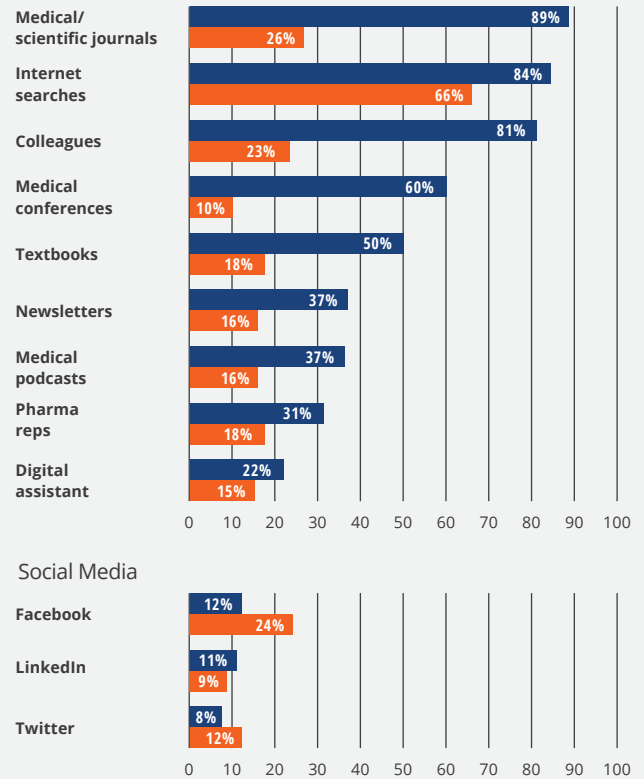
TRUSTED SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The Internet is a primary source of information about medical care and treatment for both physicians and the general public. More than 8 in 10 physicians said they trust medical/scientific journals, Internet searches, and colleagues, while other adults said they trust Internet searches much more than any other source.

Among social media channels, Facebook is a much more popular and trusted source of health information than Twitter. Among physicians, the most common social media sources are Facebook and LinkedIn (12% and 11%), compared with only 8% for Twitter. Among the public, 24% said Facebook is a source of health information, compared with 12% for Twitter and 9% for LinkedIn.

SOURCES USED MOST:

Percentage saying they use the source somewhat or very often



MOST TRUSTED SOURCES:

Percentage choosing the source as the most trusted

