

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

February 2, 2021

Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Google
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Pichai:

Pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee is investigating the response to the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. As part of this inquiry, we are continuing to examine false and misleading information regarding COVID-19 on platforms such as yours. In July 2020, the Committee first wrote to you expressing our concerns about reports of rampant COVID-19 disinformation on Google and other platforms.¹ Today, as the country is beginning a mass vaccination campaign and is moving into a new phase of fighting COVID-19, we write to you regarding recent reports of coronavirus vaccine misinformation and disinformation occurring on your platform.²

Since writing to you last summer, COVID-19 infections and related deaths have skyrocketed to record highs.³ Hospitals around the country have seen surges in infected patients,

¹ Letter from Frank Pallone, Jr., Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to Sundar Pichai, Chief Executive Officer, Google (Jul. 8, 2020).

² *'We Are Talking About People's Lives': Dire Warnings of Public Health Crisis as COVID-19 Misinformation Rages*, USA Today (Dec. 9, 2020); *Misinformation Messengers Pivot from Election Fraud to Peddling Vaccine Conspiracy Theories*, New York Times (Dec. 16, 2020); *Normalization of Vaccine Misinformation on Social Media Amid COVID 'a Huge problem,'* ABC News (Dec. 10, 2020); *COVID Vaccine: Disappearing Needles and Other Rumors Debunked*, BBC News (Dec. 20, 2020).

³ *U.S. Surpasses Coronavirus Deaths and Hospitalization Records Amid Delay in Vaccinations*, Washington Post (Dec. 30, 2020).

with some hospitals running out of beds and rationing care.⁴ In December, the Food and Drug Administration granted Emergency Use Authorizations for two COVID-19 vaccines found to be safe and effective based on available evidence, and states are now administering these vaccines to targeted populations.⁵ As the country enters this next phase in its fight against the virus—the success of which is dependent on hundreds of millions of Americans trusting the science behind these vaccines—the Committee is deeply troubled by news reports of coronavirus vaccine misinformation on your platform.⁶ In fact, the proliferation of false and misleading information on platforms is so widespread that the American Medical Association wrote to your company last month urging you to “guard against disinformation.”⁷

These COVID-19 vaccines and others in development present hope in turning the deadly tide of the last year and can be a powerful tool in our efforts to contain the pandemic—but only if the public has confidence in them. Thus, it is imperative that Google stops the spread of false or misleading information about coronavirus vaccines on its platform. False and misleading information is dangerous, and if relied on by the public to make critical health choices, it could result in the loss of human life.

To better understand Google’s actions to curb vaccine misinformation and disinformation, the Committee requests you provide the following information by February 16, 2021:

1. Please describe in detail all actions Google has taken to limit false or misleading COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation on its platform, including the date Google first started its efforts to curb vaccine misinformation or disinformation. In your response, please also provide answers to the following questions:
 - a. Which part of your organization are involved in these efforts and what are the roles of these offices and/or divisions?
 - b. What types of resources (e.g., tools and methods) are being used to correct, curtail, or remove the false or misleading COVID-19 vaccine information on your

⁴ *Some California Hospitals Rationing Care Due to Spike in COVID-19 Hospitalizations*, ABC News (Dec. 28, 2020); *Georgia’s Largest Hospital is Full—and Weighs ‘Tough Choice’ as COVID Cases Climb*, Miami Herald (Jan.14, 2020).

⁵ Food and Drug Administration, *FDA Takes Key Action in Fight Against COVID-19 by Issuing Emergency Use Authorization for First COVID-19 Vaccination* (Dec. 11, 2020) (press release); Food and Drug Administration, *FDA Takes Additional Action in Fight Against COVID-19 by Issuing Emergency Use Authorization for Second COVID-19 Vaccine* (Dec.18, 2020) (press release).

⁶ See note 2.

⁷ American Medical Association, *AMA Urges Social Media Companies to Combat Vaccine Misinformation* (Dec. 21, 2020) (press release).

platform?

- c. How many full-time equivalent employees and contractors are currently dedicated to the problem of vaccine misinformation?
2. Please describe all policy changes Google has implemented to stop the spread of false or misleading COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation on its platform. For each policy change and/or action Google has taken to limit COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation on its platform, please describe how your company is measuring the effectiveness of each such policy change and/or action.
 - a. Has Google commissioned any studies, analyses, or product tests to understand COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and disinformation on its platform and the breadth of such misinformation or disinformation available on its platform? If yes, please provide the Committee with a copy of each study, analysis, and/or results of product tests. If no, does Google plan to commission any related studies, analyses, or product tests?
3. If Google has used information labels or other types of notifications to alert users about COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation on its platform, please provide the date it first began implementing labels or notifications and how Google is measuring the effectiveness of the label or notification in fighting COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and disinformation.
 - a. What factors or criteria does Google use to determine whether a post or content should be removed rather than appended with a label or notification (and vice versa)?
 - b. Please share a copy of the results of any studies, analyses, or product tests related to the efficacy of labels, notifications, or similar interventions for responding to COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation conducted in the last 12 months.
4. Please describe, on average, the five most common targeted advertisements that appear alongside COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation on your platform.
 - a. Are companies whose advertisements appear on your platform aware or notified that their advertisements are being placed next to COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation?
 - b. In the past 12 months, has any company expressed concern that their advertisements were being placed next to COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation on your platform? If so, please explain and provide a description of the actions your company took to rectify the problem.

5. Please describe in detail Google's COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and disinformation enforcement efforts. In your response, please describe when Google first took enforcement actions against individuals and/or groups peddling COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation and provide the following information:
 - a. The number of accounts suspended, groups removed, and posts or content taken down that violated Google's policy against sharing COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation; and
 - b. The number of information or notification panels appended to posts or content regarding the COVID-19 vaccine.

6. Since January 31, 2020, has Google coordinated any actions or activities with other online platforms related to COVID-19 vaccine misinformation or disinformation? If so, please describe these coordination efforts and specify the platforms with which you are coordinating or have coordinated.
 - a. Please also describe how your company is working with governments at all levels (federal, state, territorial, tribal, local), medical or scientific associations, fact-checkers, and researchers to tackle online COVID-19 vaccine misinformation on your platform.

Mr. Sundar Pichai

February 2, 2021

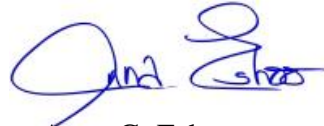
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Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. Should you have any questions, please contact Mohammad Aslami, Lisa Goldman, and Gerald Leverich with the Majority staff at (202) 225-2927.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman




Anna G. Eshoo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Health



Diana DeGette
Chair
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations



Mike Doyle
Chairman
Subcommittee on Communications
and Technology



Jan Schakowsky
Chair
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection
and Commerce