

iHealthFacts.ie ‘fact checking’ claims in a pandemic



Everyday, claims are made about ways to treat or prevent COVID-19 on social media, some reliable and some unreliable. Unreliable claims can lead to poorly informed health choices. iHealthFacts is a resource where the public can quickly and easily check the reliability of health claims circulated by social media.

What we did



Aim

In March 2020, in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cochrane Ireland, Evidence Synthesis Ireland and the HRB-Trials Methodology Research Network (HRB-TMRN), worked with partners to set up the Emergency Evidence Response Service at NUI Galway. We are currently working on more than 25 projects to address gaps in evidence about COVID-19, including answering questions for organisations like the World Health Organization. Policy-makers, researchers, patients and health professionals all benefit from this evidence. As part of this initiative, we created iHealthFacts, an online resource where members of the public can check the current evidence for health claims.



Activities

We developed iHealthFacts.ie, an online resource that enables the public to quickly and easily check the reliability of health claims. iHealthFacts helps the public to use evidence to make informed decisions about their own health while also providing a platform where members of the public can submit health claim questions to be ‘fact checked’ by a team of evidence researchers. We hope iHealthFacts will also encourage people to think critically about health claims circulating on social media.



Collaboration

Cochrane Ireland, Evidence Synthesis Ireland and the HRB-TMRN, together with our Partners and Evidence Advisors developed iHealthFacts (funded by the Health Research Board).

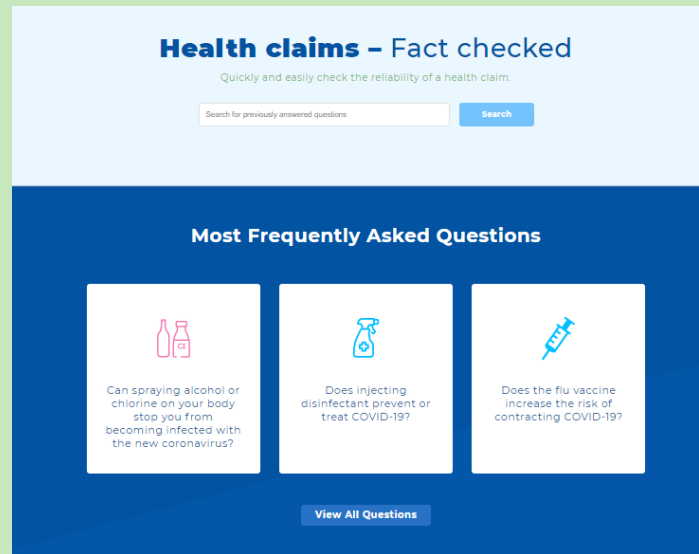
What we achieved

iHealthFacts launched in April 2020. As of November 2020, we have had:

- 41,000 unique page views from more than 127 countries;
- 500 health claims submitted for us to check and more than 1000 searches about various claims;
- 35 health claims fact checked to date. Questions the public have asked us to research include ‘Does Chloroquine prevent or treat COVID-19?’, ‘Are face shields as effective as facemasks in protecting against COVID 19?’ and ‘Does a high BMI increase vulnerability to COVID-19?’
- 8 newspaper articles and 6 media interviews about the service;
- Facebook posts reaching over 10,000 people, 428,000 Twitter impressions and 3,500 Instagram impressions.

“Great to hear the evidence and not have it sugar coated. Truth builds trust. Great to see truly evidence-based Health Facts.”

-User of iHealthFacts



See more here: <http://www.ihealthfacts.ie/>, <https://evidencesynthesisireland.ie/covid-19> and <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD202002/full>

What we learnt

1

Cochrane Ireland, with its partners and independent network of health practitioners, researchers, patient advocates and others, responded quickly and effectively to the challenge of making emerging evidence, generated through research, available to inform decisions about health during a pandemic. The Emergency Evidence Response Service and iHealthFacts provided robust, reliable evidence to researchers, healthcare professionals, policy makers and members of the public. **Working in partnership with other organisations** meant that our services could be planned, launched and operational in a short timeframe, for example, iHealthFacts was fully functional and live within four weeks.

2

We learnt that **our systematic processes are critical when providing robust, unbiased** evidence to determine the reliability of health claims circulating on social media. Our process includes searching for systematic reviews, with all draft claims reviewed independently by a second researcher, at least one healthcare specialist, a public representative and a health journalist. We continue to review all published claims regularly and update claims as and when new evidence emerges.

3

Unreliable claims can lead to poorly informed choices. We believe iHealthFacts offers the public robust, reliable evidence to counter harmful disinformation and misinformation circulating on social media and supports people to develop critical thinking skills.



Learn more

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