

Hoaxes spread coronavirus fears

As the disease reached Florida, so did the rumors. We turned to PolitiFact to set the record straight.

BY ROMY ELLENBOGEN

Times Staff Writer

Searching on Instagram for **#coronavirus** won't give users posts. Instead, it'll give them a popup, asking if they're looking for information and directing them to the CDC. A Facebook search for **coronavirus** recommends the CDC and shows mostly official health organizations.

It's part of Facebook's attempt to remove and monitor misinformation about **coronavirus**, which has run rampant since it began to spread in China.

In the Tampa Bay area, three people have tested positive for **coronavirus**. Even with the company's effort to fight misinformation, rumors have spread locally. Here's a breakdown on some popular posts that are hoaxes, with help from PolitiFact.

Myth: There's a coronavirus patient at the Tampa VA hospital

There are no positive **coronavirus** patients at the James A. Haley Veteran's Hospital in Tampa, said public affairs officer Ed Drohan.

Myth: Trinity Hospital was on lockdown for a positive coronavirus patient

A Facebook post said the hospital, Medical Center of Trinity, was on lockdown and refusing to let people in or out. The post said a patient in the ICU was tested positive for **coronavirus**. The post is false, said Debra McKell, the marketing director for HCA West Florida Division.

Myth: The virus can be transferred through the water system

The CDC says the virus spreads from person to person in close contact, within about 6 feet. Sally Alrabaa, an associate professor of infectious diseases at the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine, said it can't spread through water systems in buildings or cities, and instead passes through respiratory droplets from someone or from droplets they leave on a surface.

Myth: 38 percent of Americans won't drink Corona because of the outbreak

PolitiFact ruled this false. The poll, run by a public relations company, looked at about 700 beer drinkers and not the general population. The people polled were given leading questions, and the PR firm wouldn't provide the results of the questions when asked.

Myth: Hand sanitizer does nothing for Coronavirus

PolitiFact ruled this false. A tweet circulating on Twitter said that hand sanitizer is anti-bacterial, and a bacteria and a virus are different. However, the CDC recommends frequent hand washing and using a hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water aren't available. A number of studies have also shown that alcohol-based hand sanitizers work against 'enveloped viruses' like coronaviruses.

Myth: A Sarasota hospital is filled with multiple coronavirus patients

There is one confirmed case of **coronavirus** in Manatee County. An article posted by a man who has been accused of impersonating journalists and writing false news stories said there were anywhere from three to eight patients at Doctors Hospital in Sarasota.

Only one patient is being treated at the hospital, according to the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*.

A woman who works at the hospital and her son are also quarantined at home as a precautionary measure, according to the *Bradenton Herald*. PolitiFact ruled the article claiming there are more cases false.

Myth: Hair weave from China causes coronavirus

Although China, which currently has the most extensive outbreak of **coronavirus**, is a larger producer of hair extensions, the idea that they can carry **coronavirus** was deemed false by PolitiFact. The Food and Drug Administration said there's been no evidence the virus can spread through goods, and the CDC said there is a very low risk of the virus spreading through packages shipped over the course of days or weeks. There have been no cases of people getting **coronavirus** because of imported items.

Wonder if what you're seeing on social media is true or false? Email it to us at rellenbogen@tampabay.com

Contact Romy Ellenbogen at rellenbogen@tampabay.com. Follow @romyellenbogen.
