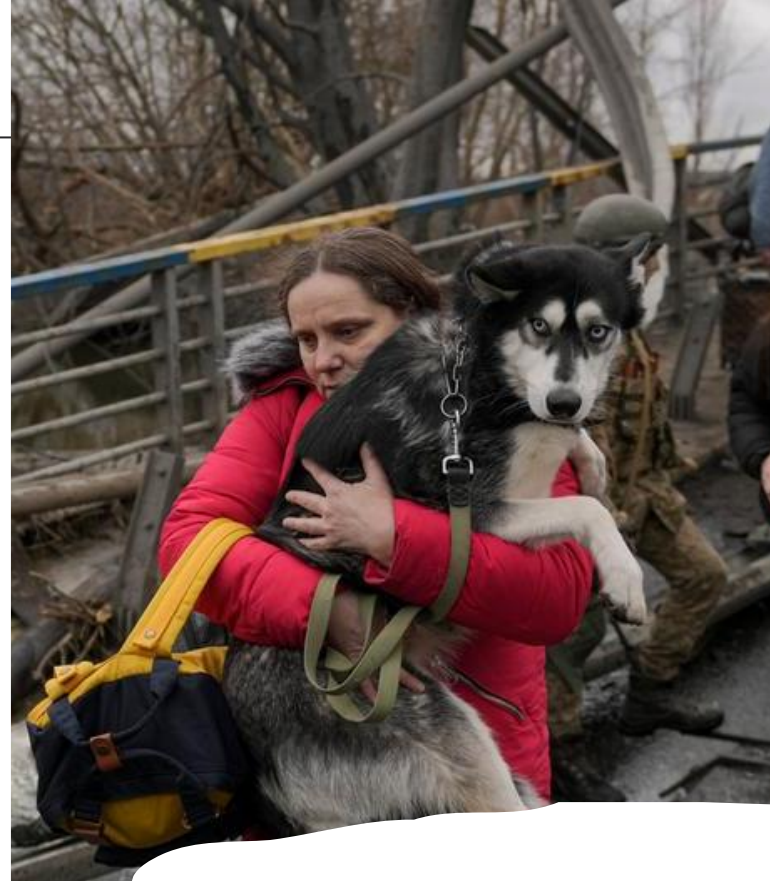




Countering disinformation and misinformation in animal health emergencies

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*Strengthening Preparedness and Response to
Biological Threats in Europe*



**An ever-changing hazard
landscape for Veterinary
Services**



The hazards - false, deceptive, misleading, or manipulated information

Misinformation

- False information, spread without knowingly intending to cause harm.
- Common, all around us

Disinformation

- False information, spread with intent to deceive, mislead, or cause harm.
- Less common, greater risks, may be illegal



Backlash in Kenya over livestock vaccines and belching cows

28 January 2025

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Wycliffe Muia, BBC News & Peter Mwai, BBC Verify
Nairobi



An ambitious initiative to vaccinate all livestock in Kenya is due to kick off this week amid fierce resistance from farmers that is being driven by misleading claims about the vaccines.

It will cost farmers nothing to get their animals vaccinated as the government says it is footing the bill.

But Robert Nkukuu, who keeps cattle in the Mai Mahiu area of Nakuru county - some 50km (30 miles) north-west of the capital, Nairobi, explained how it had become a toxic issue since President William Ruto announced the plan last November.

"If the community here learns you are pro-vaccination they will slay you just now. So stop talking about it, we don't want it," he told the BBC.

The government's aim is to vaccinate at least 22 million cattle and 50 million goats and sheep over three years.

BBC



Some UK social media users have been pouring milk down their sinks and toilets in protest at the trial of a new feed additive that claims to significantly reduce the emission of methane gas in dairy cows.

Arla Foods, a Danish-Swedish company which owns the UK's biggest dairy cooperative, announced last week that 30 of its farms across the country would test the additive, named Bovaer.

The company behind Bovaer - which is added in small quantities to cow feed - says it could reduce cow methane emissions by between 30-45%.

It has been approved for use by UK regulators, and several major supermarkets will stock milk produced by cattle eating feed with the additive.

[Why misinformation about cow feed additive Bovaer prompted people to throw Arla milk away](#)



Dans le sillage de la crise de la dermatose nodulaire contagieuse, des vétérinaires ont fait l'objet d'insultes et de menaces gravissimes. En cause ? Une déferlante de d



Arrivée en France en juin 2025, la dermatose nodulaire contagieuse (DNC) a rapidement fait l'objet de mesures sanitaires qui ont permis d'éradiquer le virus dans certaines régions. Mais la crise agricole qui a suivi a vu émerger une contestation inédite, nourrie par des fausses informations et des remises en cause du rôle des vétérinaires. Dans ce texte, la profession appelle à un « droit de véto » contre la désinformation.



La dermatose nodulaire contagieuse (DNC) a atteint la France en Savoie le 29 juin 2025 à la suite de l'introduction d'un bovin infecté venant d'Italie. La France métropolitaine étant alors indemne de la DNC, la réglementation européenne prévue (dépeuplement total, vaccination d'urgence au sein des zones réglementées (ZR) – instaurées par arrêté préfectoral, limitation des mouvements des bovins...) a été mise en place, ce qui a permis d'éliminer le virus dans la région dès le 21 août.

Les contaminations ultérieures qui ont suivi en France, notamment en Occitanie, sont en réalité le résultat de déplacements illicites de bovins contagieux à partir de la zone réglementée couvrant une partie de l'Ain, de la Savoie et de la Haute-Savoie (zone vaccinale II sur la carte ci-dessous).

<https://theconversation.com/dermatose-nodulaire-contagieuse-les-veterinaires-victimes-dune-epidemie-de-desinformation-273027>



Wild boars graze in a park in Gdansk, Poland on August 25, 2025 (AFP / Sergei GAPON)

Misinformation spreads as Croatia battles African swine fever

Published on November 28, 2025 at 13:48 | Updated on December 1, 2025 at 10:55 | 7 min read |

By Gabriela LULIC, AFP Croatia

Croatia has been affected by African swine fever (ASF) since 2023, with hundreds of cases confirmed in wild boars. To control the outbreak, the government announced a series of measures in October 2025 including culling, restrictions on animal movement and the establishment of biosecurity zones. Social media users responded by falsely claiming that there were no infected wild boars in Croatia and that the measures lack scientific and legal justification. However, experts and international organisations have confirmed the presence of ASF in Croatia, and AFP found that the measures are in line with European regulations and backed by science.



The threat

Untreated, misinformation and disinformation can:

- damage lives and livelihoods
- undermine trust
- spread confusion
- consume attention and resources
- cause economic and social damage



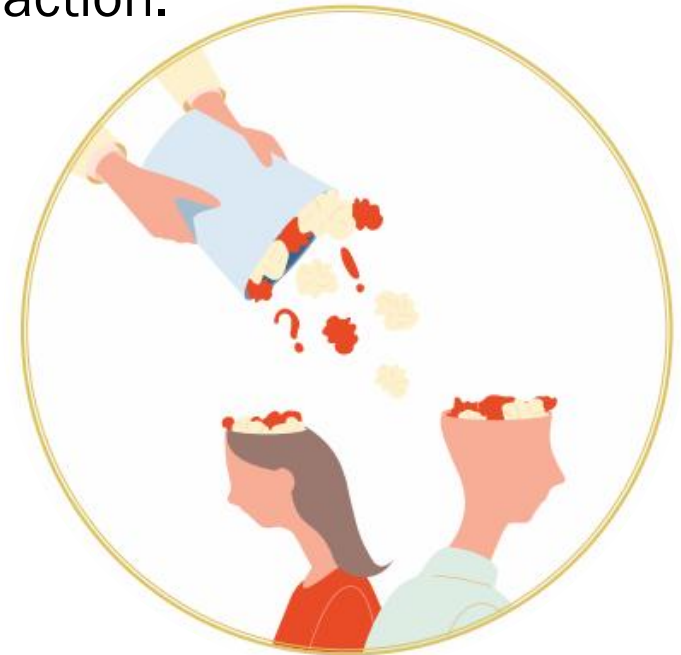
<https://blog.dana-farber.org/insight/2025/01/understanding-the-spread-of-science-misinformation/>

Countering animal health misinformation and disinformation often requires joint action by Veterinary Services and Law Enforcement agencies.



Motivations – Why share mis/disinformation?

- Not always with “bad” intent
 - real belief, desire for truth
 - agrees with already held beliefs
- Overtly negative intent..
 - Advance a political, religious, economic, cultural or other goal.
 - Make money or gain other financial advantage
- Get attention, be heard or to gain greater online status.
- For fun ... mischief
- Distrust of ‘establishments’
 - Disagreement with something or wanting it to end or be changed.
 - Undermine the credibility, trust and reputation of a person, organisation or course of action.





Facilitating spread – enclosed ecosystems

- Digital ‘**echo chambers**’ and ‘**filter bubbles**’ → mediate the information we see, watch, hear, and share.
- Organisations **tend to interact in known and safe spaces** → easy to miss critical debates or lack abilities to intervene beyond comfort zones.
- **Lack of awareness & overestimation** of our ability to counter misinformation.

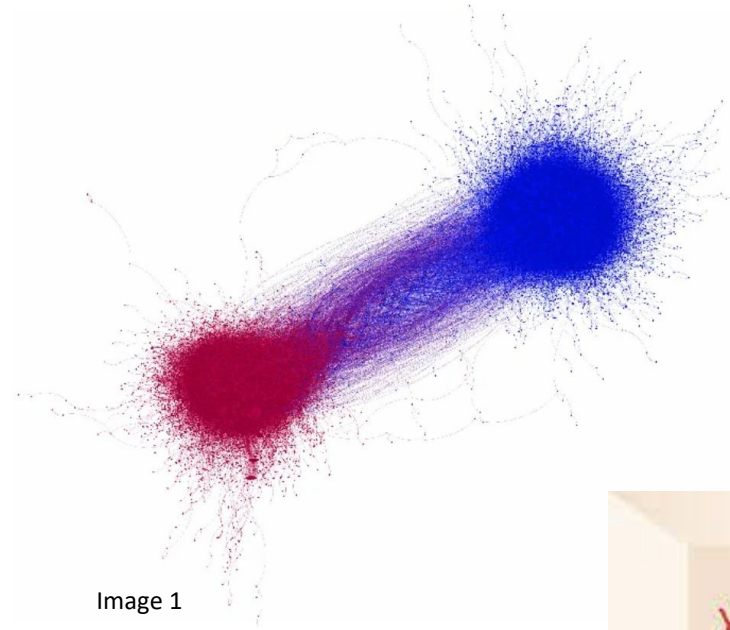


Image 1



Image 2

Image 1: Horta Ribeiro, Manoel & Calais, Pedro & Almeida, Virgilio & Meira Jr, Wagner. (2017). "Everything I Disagree With is #FakeNews": Correlating Political Polarization and Spread of Misinformation. 10.48550/arXiv.1706.05924.

Image 2: <https://theconversation.com/the-problem-of-living-inside-echo-chambers-110486>



Facilitating spread – technical innovation

- Widely available digital and communication tools can easily create, manipulate and ‘virally’ share or target messages and images.
- ‘**Clickbait**’ → sensationalised headlines link to often misleading information
- ‘**Deepfakes**’ → digitally altered audio, images and video that misrepresent people
- ‘**Trolls**’ → people using social media to attack and undermine others and their ideas
- ‘**Bots**’ → computer programs automatically disseminate fake news on social media

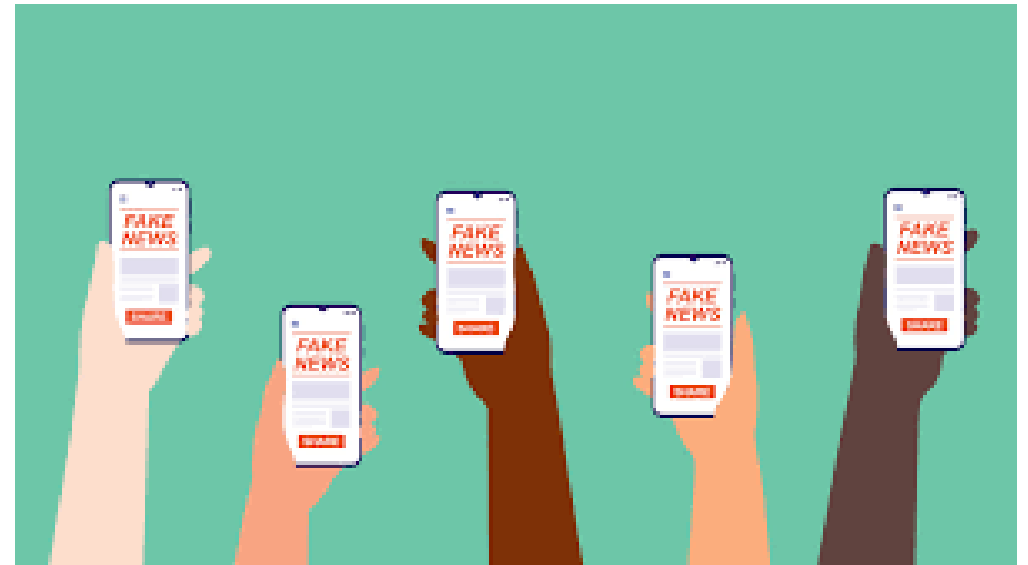


Image: <https://news.sky.com/story/prebunking-the-new-tactic-to-help-you-people-spot-fake-news-12811636>



Countering the threats



Prepare



Detect



Respond



Countering the threats

- **Raise awareness and recognise threats**, educate ourselves to take timely action, putting in place robust and agile plans, procedures and capacities.
- **Training, gaming, and other exercises** help people understand threats and get prepared.
- **Coordinate actions** across agencies and borders, bringing in specialised skills and networks when needed.
- Build ‘**cognitive resilience**’ in people and organisations so they can better manage the threats.
- Build **feedback loops and learning** to be better prepared for the next emergency.



Early actions

Risk planning

- 1) **Communication** – engage communities, dynamic listening and gaining trust;
- 2) **Assessment** – define hazards and triggers, identify risk pathways, control points, and consequences;
- 3) **Management** – monitoring, surveillance and risk detection, increase the prevalence of true information; decrease the prevalence of false information.

Ex. The Myanmar Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation recently developed a plan for risk communication in animal disease outbreaks and emergencies.



Prepare

Simulating misinformation threats

- In New Mexico, ‘tabletop’ exercises (TTX) of the Southwest Border Center for Emergency Preparedness and Food Protection worked through several animal disease disinformation scenarios.
- **Aim:** develop and facilitate preparedness efforts across different jurisdictional areas and countries (both Mexico and the United States).
- **Lessons learned:** need for trustworthy sources, consistent messaging, and to involve everyone, not just public agencies.



Countering the threats



Reach out: Build **trust and connections** and extend organisational reach, for intelligence-gathering and readiness to act.



Monitor and assess misinformation/disinformation risks and threats and changes over time.



Social listening draws insights from social media and other online forums to hear what people are concerned about, to pinpoint emerging issues, threats, and risks.



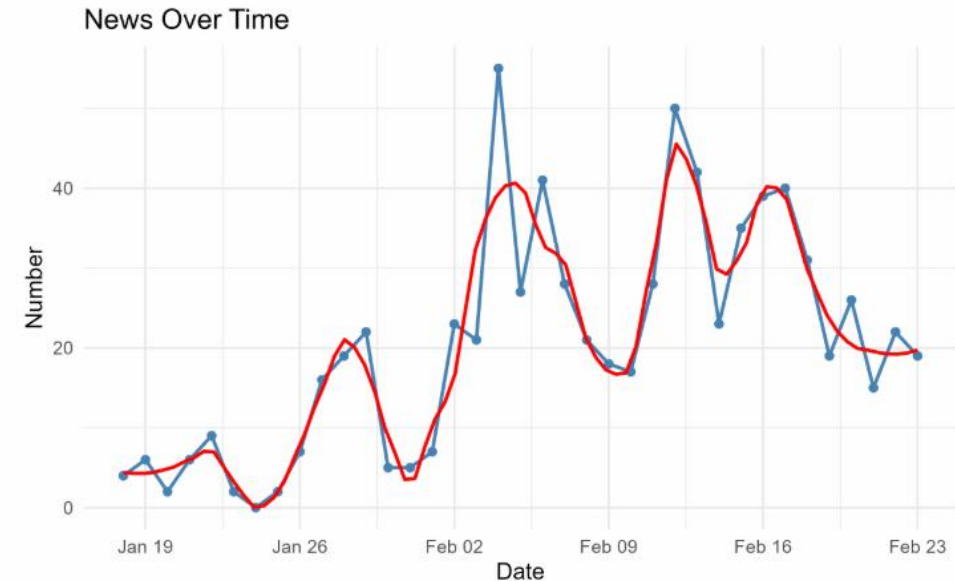
Detect

Social listening examples

Media attention (number of news in blue and trend in red) [↗](#)

Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources

- The EIOS initiative of public health stakeholders – including WOHAT – provides a unified early detection, verification, assessment and communication of public health threats using publicly available information.
- <https://www.who.int/inOS>



Potential for Mis/Disinformation or Communication Concerns

South Africa

- Fact-checking notes familiar pandemic-style narratives—e.g., miracle cures, vaccine conspiracies, claims of “government cover-ups”—spreading via social media and WhatsApp groups. Guidance urges reliance on official veterinary channels, WRLFMD/WOAH resources, and transparent, frequent updates to reduce rumor space.



Social listening examples

Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources

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- <https://www.who.int/initiatives/eios>

Social listening dashboard

- The UNICEF Vaccine Demand Observatory dashboard centralizes misinformation alerts, fact checks, and media data from global and community sources.
- This is used by staff to monitor misinformation and respond to it with evidence-based communication strategies.
- <https://www.thevdo.org>



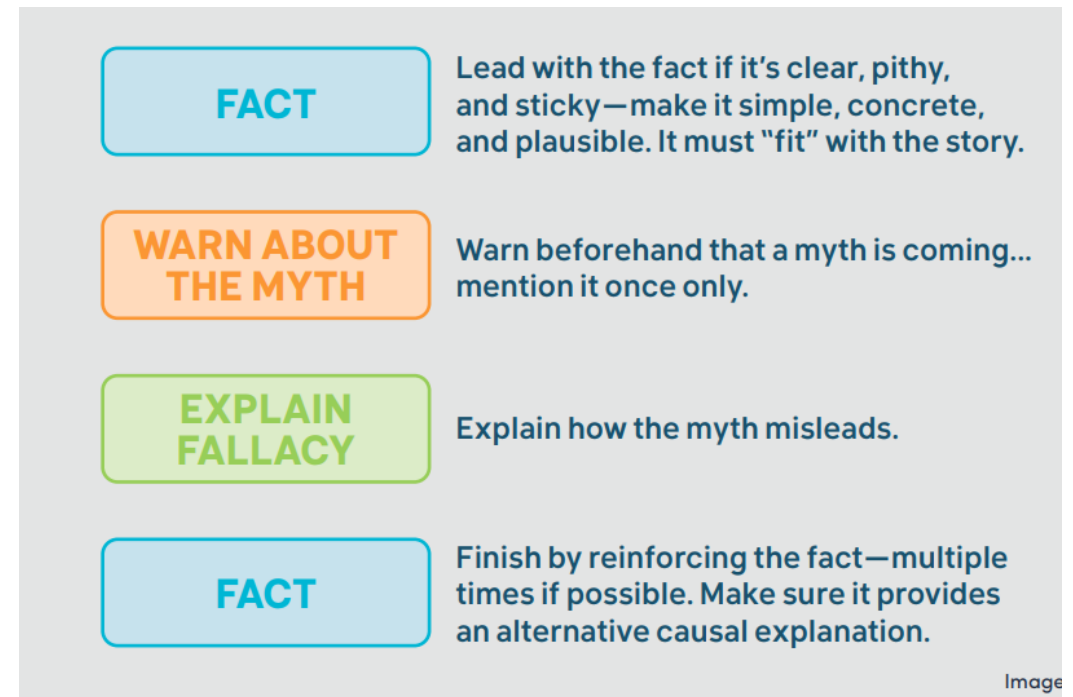
Countering the threats

- **Pre-bunking.** ‘Inoculation’ with facts counteracts false messages before they are widely spread. Fill risky ‘information voids’ in advance of mis- or disinformation taking hold.
- **De-bunking and fact-checking.** Challenge and correct the false information.
- **Build alliances** where partners share the load and amplify the impact of counter-messaging.
- An important ally is **media** for fact-checking.
- Work with social or community ‘**influencers**’ to reach and convince ‘distant’ audiences, usually in wider **communications campaigns**



Respond

• The ‘truth’ sandwich



<https://www.climatechangecommunication.org/debunking-handbook-2020>



“Truth sandwich” example

1 Fact

Monkeypox is an animal-to-human (zoonotic) transmitted disease.

Start with the facts that support the verified information

2 Warning

A **false claim** has been circulating in a video disseminated in different social media platforms.

Add explicit warnings that the content about to be presented is false

3 Fallacy

The **post falsely implies** that monkeypox is biological warfare being unleashed onto the public by the WHO, IMF and Bill Gates.

Explain what is the false claim and why it is wrong

4 Fact

The monkeypox outbreak was not caused by biological warfare. The disease was discovered in 1958 in monkeys, and the first human case was recorded in 1970. There have been several outbreaks in humans, none related to biological warfare.

Replace disinformation with facts at the end of the process



Take home messages



- ‘We’ are more vulnerable than ever before / ‘They’ have great opportunities and tools / national governments start to make disinformation illegal
- Our ‘resistance’ to these hazards can be increased – through resilience-building as well as good planning and real-life simulations
- We can better monitor and detect risks and threats – through social listening, stronger analytical capacities, building trust, and forming alliances
- We can pre-emptively respond to threats, pre-bunking and inoculating people with facts and early warning
- We can counter active incidents with fact-checking, evidence, communications and de-bunking measures

Recognise and understand the threats; boost our own emergency preparedness and response capacities; understand when harmful becomes illegal; and build joint actions that integrate intelligence and expertise across diverse agencies.



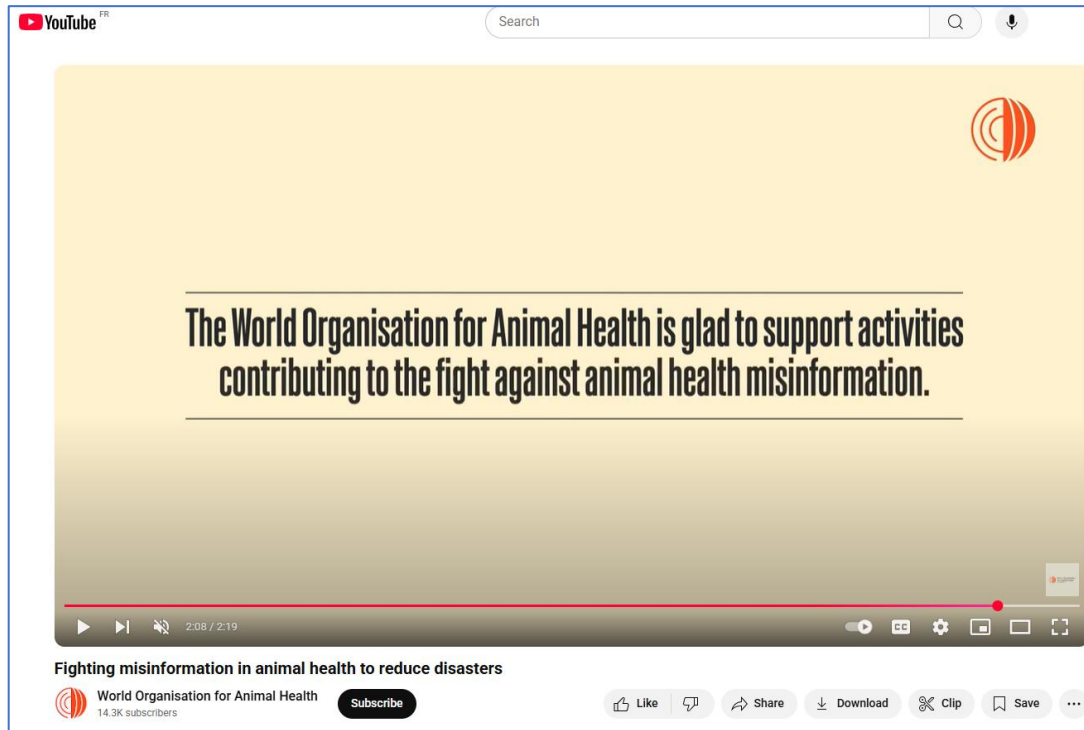
Reflection: Misinformation/Disinformation in your context

- Do you know any examples of where misinformation and disinformation affected how farmers, pet owners, or policymakers make decisions? What were the consequences?
- What should be the role of Veterinary Services in combatting misinformation and disinformation about animal health?
- Do you think fact-checking and scientific literacy should be part of veterinary education? Why or why not?

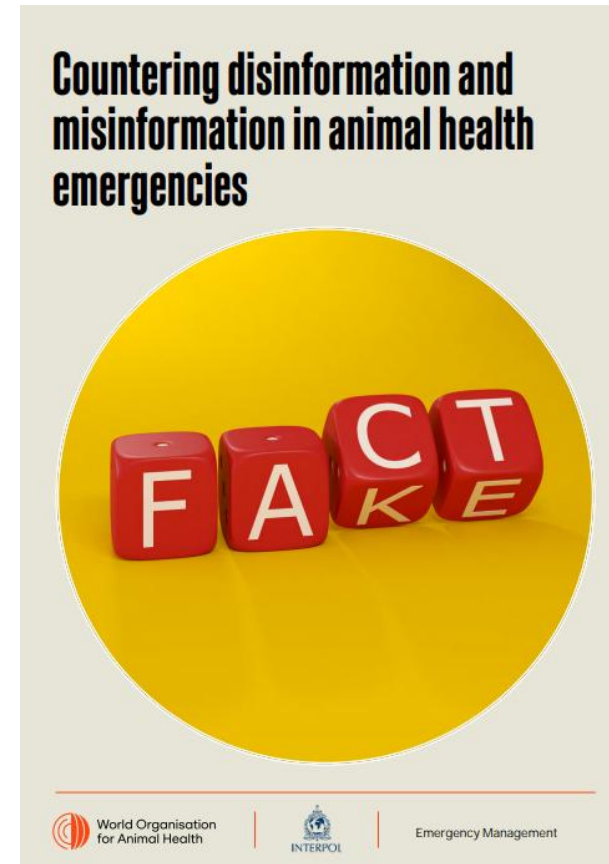


Additional resources

Video: [Fighting misinformation in animal health to reduce disasters](#)



WOAH Guidelines



[English](#)
[French](#)
[Español](#)



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Thank you for your attention

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