

29 June 2020 – In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the phenomenon of an 'infodemic' has escalated to a level that requires a coordinated response. As WHO's Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, warned the world of this threat of an 'infodemic', it is getting harder for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance needed due to an overabundance of information-some accurate and some not-occurring during a disease outbreak.

To tackle this threat for current and future generations, WHO is today hosting its first Global Infodemiology Conference, starting on 29 June 2020. The conference is bringing together experts around the world to:

- highlight the multidisciplinary nature of infodemic management;
- identify examples and tools to help manage infodemics;
- build an agenda to direct focus and investment to this emerging field;
- establish a community of practice and research.

### **What is infodemic mangament?**

An infodemic is an overabundance of information – some accurate and some not – occurring during an epidemic. In a similar manner to an epidemic it spreads between humans through digital and physical information systems. During epidemics and crises, it becomes even more important to disseminate accurate information quickly, identify and lower barriers for individuals to take steps to protect themselves, their families and communities against the infection. Even when people have access to high-quality information, there are still barriers they must overcome to take the recommended action. Like pathogens in epidemics, misinformation spreads further and faster and adds complexity to health emergency response.

An infodemic cannot be eliminated but it can be managed. To respond effectively to infodemics, WHO calls for adaptation, development, validation and evaluation of new evidence-based measures and practices to prevent, detect and respond to mis- and disinformation.

Infodemic management uses many skillsets to prioritize and problem solve the issue of too much and inaccurate information about the current COVID-19 infodemic. The infodemic

dimension should be considered a pillar of an integrative approach to public health in complex knowledge societies.

The history of public health in the 20th and 21st century is full of examples of how misinformation caused harm during outbreaks and continued to do damage in trust in health authorities long afterward. The tools at health authorities’ disposal have been limited and expertise siloed.

The stakes are higher in a digitized world, where misinformation and mixed messages overwhelm individuals and communities. This is not just a communication problem, but it requires a full rethinking of evidence-based approaches to infodemic management, putting people and communities at the center.

### **Everyone has a role in managing infodemic**

In early April, WHO has convened a public consultation to crowdsource ideas for an infodemic management framework, with a whole-of-society perspective. Everyone has a role to play in infodemic response, and from the response, it became clear that establishing the foundations of the science of infodemic management was a priority for all regions of the world

It is everyone’s responsibility to amplify reliable, evidence-based information. Earlier this month, the UN Secretary-General presented a set of recommended actions to ensure everyone is “connected, respected and protected in the digital age”. Tools have been developed that can help Member States combat the infodemic. It’s vital that countries become more proficient in their knowledge and use of these tools to effectively manage infodemics.

WHO echoed this in its resolution on COVID-19, adopted at this year’s World Health Assembly, which called on countries, international organizations and others to counter disinformation and prevent the proliferation of both disinformation and misinformation.

### **Related link**

[First WHO Infodemiology Conference](#)

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