

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 1, 2021

Steve Huffman, CEO
Reddit
420 Taylor St.
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Mr. Huffman:

We are concerned about the rapid spread of misinformation on Reddit specific to the unproven and dangerous use of ivermectin to treat Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19). We appreciate your statement that “Reddit is a place for open and authentic discussion and debate,” but dangerous misinformation about ivermectin is a serious threat to public health. Misuse of ivermectin can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, hypotension, allergic reactions, dizziness, ataxia, seizures, coma and even death, according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).¹ We urge you to promote evidence-based health information and act swiftly to curb the spread of dangerous medical misinformation on your platform.

Reddit’s own security team recently stated that “we can infer that there has been an increase in COVID denial content on the platform, and that increase has been more pronounced since July [2021].”² Some of this misinformation has included anti-science and anti-vaccination groups pushing ivermectin, an anti-parasite drug commonly used for livestock and not approved to treat COVID-19,³ as an unauthorized and dangerous COVID-19 treatment. On your platform, users have even been encouraged to take ivermectin formulated for livestock.⁴

Several hundred Reddit moderators recently posted an open letter calling for action to stop the spread of COVID-19 misinformation on Reddit stating, “It is clear that even after promising to tackle the problem of misinformation on this site, *nothing of substance has been done*... We are

¹ “Why You Should Not Use Ivermectin to Treat or Prevent COVID-19,” Sept 3, 2021,

<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/why-you-should-not-use-ivermectin-treat-or-prevent-covid-19>

² “COVID denialism and policy clarifications,” Sept 1, 2021,

https://www.reddit.com/r/redditsecurity/comments/pfyqqn/covid_denialism_and_policy_clarifications/

³ “CDC Health Advisory: Rapid Increase in Ivermectin Prescriptions and Reports of Severe Illness Associated with Use of Products Containing Ivermectin to Prevent or Treat COVID-19,” Aug 26, 2021,

https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2021/pdf/CDC_HAN_449.pdf

⁴ “Please consider that even if you can get an Rx for IVM, the pharmacy may not fill it for 1-3 days claiming they don’t have it in stock... HAVE SOME HORSE PASTE ON HAND,” “Clamoring for ivermectin, some turn to a pro-Trump telemedicine website,” Aug 27, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/27/clamoring-for-ivermectin-some-turn-to-pro-trump-telemedicine-website.html>

calling on the admins to take ownership of their website, and remove dangerous medical disinformation that is endangering lives and contributing to the existence of this ongoing pandemic.”⁵

Despite these calls for action to stop the spread of COVID-19 misinformation, including a ban, you refused.⁶ Instead, you stated, “Manipulating or cheating Reddit to amplify any particular viewpoint is against our policies, and we will continue to action communities that do so or that violate any of our other rules, including those dedicated to fraud...or encouraging harm...and we will continue to use our quarantine tool.”⁷ But the spread of COVID-19 misinformation does “encourage” harm, both for your users and for the already-strained hospital system that is left to treat people who misuse ivermectin.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one adult “drank an injectable ivermectin formulation intended for use in cattle in an attempt to prevent COVID-19 infection. This patient presented to a hospital with confusion, drowsiness, visual hallucinations, tachypnea, and tremors.”⁸ In New Mexico, two deaths have been linked to ivermectin misuse.⁹ And in August, the Minnesota Poison Control System saw an increase in exposure calls for ivermectin.¹⁰ The CDC issued an emergency health alert due to the rapid increase in ivermectin prescriptions and severe illness associated with the use of ivermectin products.¹¹ It is unacceptable to sit on the sidelines during a global pandemic while harmful misinformation runs rampant on your platform.

It is critical that you do more to empower and protect your users by maintaining a platform for robust conversation that does not empower false, misleading, and malicious information. The federal government and scientific community have worked tirelessly to develop evidence-based and FDA-approved vaccines to stop the spread of COVID-19, reopen schools, and promote safe workplaces so that workers can return to their jobs. The dangerous medical misinformation spread on your platform hinders these efforts, endangers your users and puts this nation’s public health in jeopardy.

⁵ “We call upon Reddit to take action against the rampant Coronavirus misinformation on their website,” Aug 26, 2021, https://www.reddit.com/r/vaxxhappened/comments/pbe8nj/we_call_upon_reddit_to_take_action_against_the/

⁶ “Debate, dissent, and protest on Reddit,” Aug 26, 2021, https://www.reddit.com/r/announcements/comments/pbmy5y/debate_dissent_and_protest_on_reddit/

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Supra*, Note 3. “CDC Health Advisory: Rapid Increase in Ivermectin Prescriptions and Reports of Severe Illness Associated with Use of Products Containing Ivermectin to Prevent or Treat COVID-19”

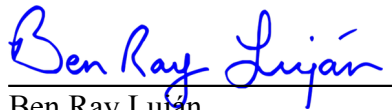
⁹ “New Mexico health officials link misuse of ivermectin to two Covid-19 deaths.,” Sept 26, 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/26/us/new-mexico-health-officials-link-misuse-of-ivermectin-to-two-covid-19-deaths.html?smtyp=cur&smid=tw-nytimes>

¹⁰ “Ivermectin poison control calls increase in Minnesota amid COVID-19 misinformation,” Sept 1, 2021, <https://www.fox9.com/news/ivermectin-poison-control-calls-increase-in-minnesota-in-august-amid-covid-19-misinformation>

¹¹ *Supra*, Note 3. “CDC Health Advisory: Rapid Increase in Ivermectin Prescriptions and Reports of Severe Illness Associated with Use of Products Containing Ivermectin to Prevent or Treat COVID-19”

We urge you to act to remove dangerous medical misinformation from Reddit. Lives are at stake.

Sincerely,



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Communication, Media, and
Broadband



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator