

*Short Communication*

## Tackling misinformation and poisoning during the Covid-19 pandemic through Facebook: Role of the Malaysia National Poison Centre

Nur Azzalia Kamaruzaman<sup>1\*</sup>, Mohd Fadhli Razali<sup>1</sup>, Mahiya Nabilla Rosaria Abdul Hamid<sup>1</sup>, Sulastri Samsudin<sup>1</sup>, Asdariah Misnan<sup>1</sup>, Nur Afni Amir<sup>1</sup>, Mohd Hafidz Jaafar<sup>2</sup>, and Mazlin Mohideen<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Malaysia National Poison Centre, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, 11800 Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> School of Industrial Technology, Universiti Sains Malaysia, USM, 11800 Penang, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Universiti Kuala Lumpur-Royal College of Medicine Perak (UniKL-RCMP), Ipoh, Perak, 30450 Malaysia

Received: 23 June 2021; Revised: 18 August 2021; Accepted: 16 September 2021

---

### Abstract

The unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic brought upon us a constant barrage of misinformation with deleterious consequences. This short communication describes the role of the Malaysia National Poison Centre (NPC) in creating awareness and clarifying misinformation surrounding ‘viral’ Covid-19 issues in Malaysia. Facebook posts were periodically published, and the number of followers increased drastically in 2020, especially at the beginning of the nationwide Movement Control Order (MCO)’s implementation, which was between March and April 2020. Among various key issues posted in Facebook, the highest numbers of reach and user activity were recorded for the following topics; health tag product (reached 1,471,936 people with 257,645 users’ activity), hand sanitizer poisoning (reached 134,600 people with 23,400 users’ activity), bleach ingestion (reached 50,000 people with 8,100 users’ activity) and disinfection tunnel (reached 27,000 people with 2,708 users’ activity). These posts were written to disseminate accurate information, caution against misuse of products, and provide appropriate recommendations for Covid-19 protection, in the NPC’s steadfast action to fight Covid-19 ‘infodemic’.

**Keywords:** social media, coronavirus, public health, health tag, hand sanitizer poisoning

---

### 1. Introduction

The advent of internet and social media has opened up new possibilities for better information circulation and outreach, thus enabling users to access, share and produce various types of content all around the globe (Del Vicario, Bessi, & Zollo, 2016). Unfortunately, the same platforms have contributed to an increasing volume of fake news and misinformation as they allow rapid and large-scale sharing (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018) and lack the traditional

mechanisms of quality control and ‘gate-keeping’ (Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Seifert, 2012). The World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the new coronavirus pandemic, which began in December 2019, was accompanied by an ‘infodemic’ of misinformation (World Health Organization, 2020a, 2020b). Misinformation about the pandemic poses a serious life-threatening risk to public health and public action amid this unprecedented global health crisis. In addition, many journalists, policy makers, and academics have stressed to the WHO the importance of taking bold steps in addressing these concerns (Brennen, Simon, Howard, & Nielsen, 2020).

Malaysia recorded its first Covid-19 case on 25 January 2020 (Pung *et al.*, 2020) and its first confirmed death

---

\*Corresponding author

Email address: azzalia@usm.my