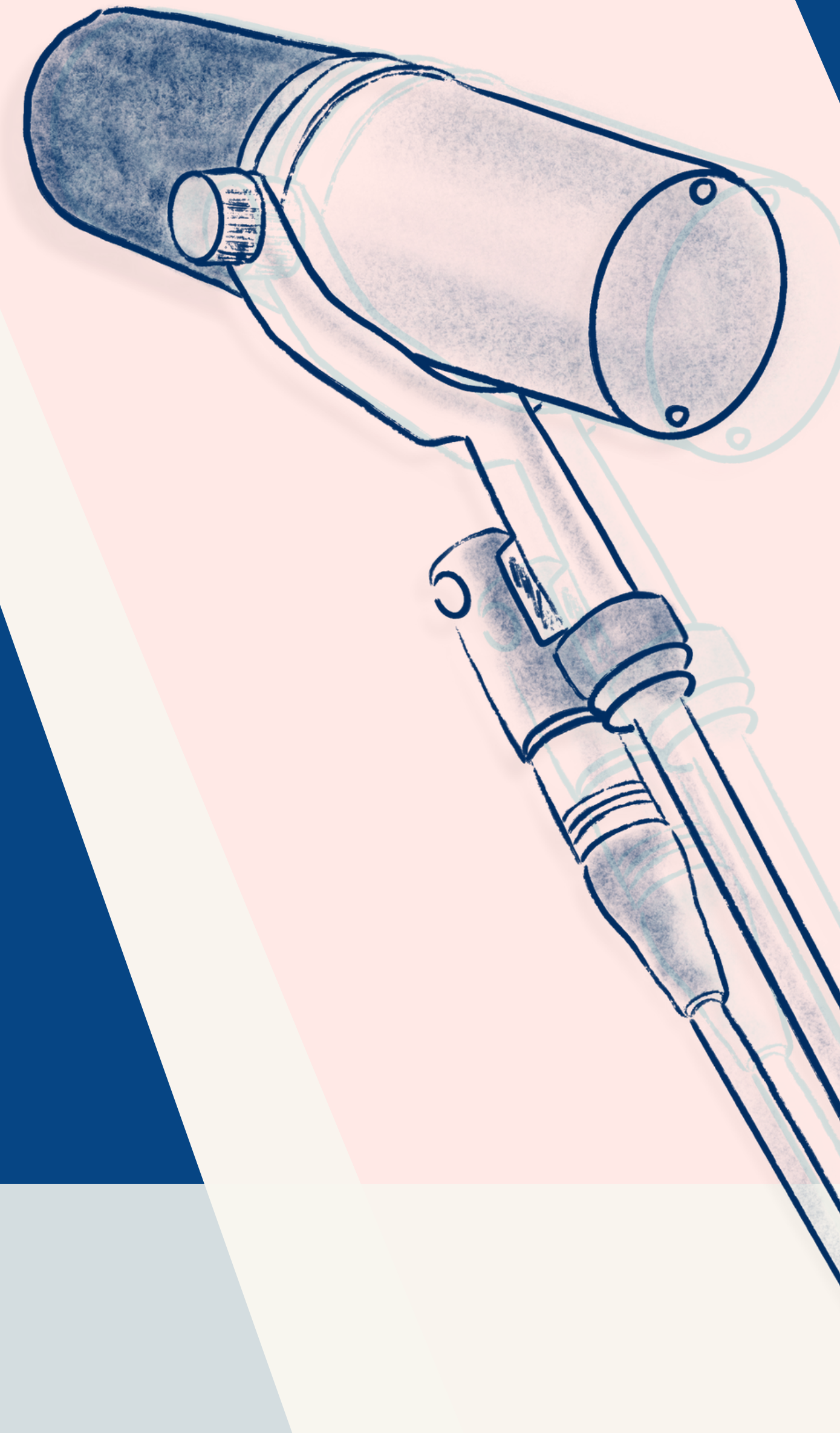


MEDIA#2 BULLETIN

LEBANON - MAY 2022

ROOTED IN TRUST 2.0

Maharat has prepared this media bulletin in cooperation with Internews as part of the Rooted in Trust 2.0 project. Maharat's team of social media monitors continues to collect rumors linked to COVID-19 on various Lebanese platforms. These rumor trends are then analyzed and fact-checked by the Maharat News team.

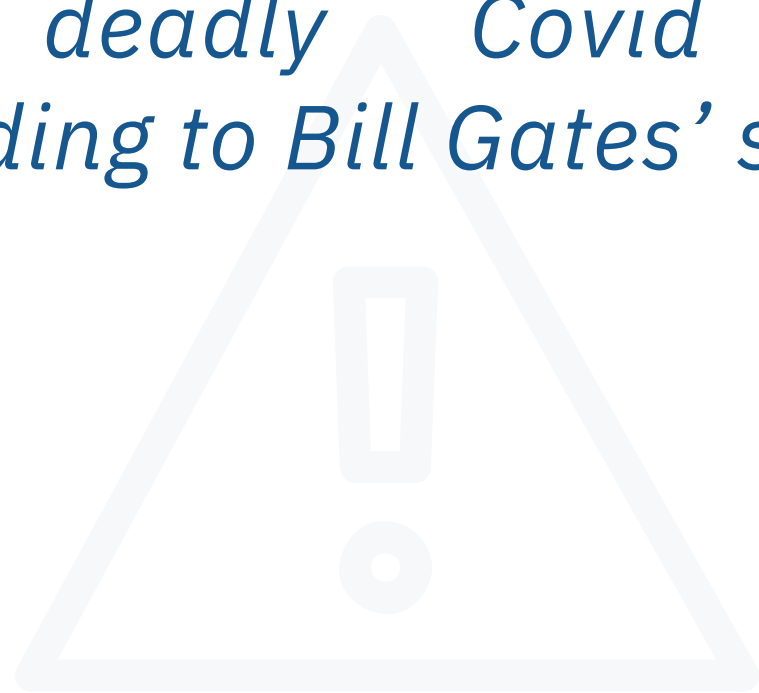


What are the people saying?

RUMOR #1

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There is a remarkable possibility of the spread of new, more severe and deadly Covid strains, according to Bill Gates' statement



The claim shared on Twitter

The American events page on Twitter posted and wrote about a statement by Microsoft CEO, Bill Gates, in which he indicated the possibility of the new emergence of a fierce and more deadly strain of the Covid-19. This raised fear among social media users and pioneers and led to many replies and questions regarding that matter.

In his statement, Gates warned that the Covid-19 pandemic is not over yet, whereby there could still be another rapidly spread and deadly strain adding "we have not seen the worst yet," noting that while he does not want to be "Very pessimistic, but the risk of a more severe variant exceeded five percent," in an interview with the Financial Times.

In addition, Gates stressed that "we are still at risk of this pandemic, which generates variants that can be more transmissible, and even more deadly," stressing that "long-term vaccines that prevent infection, are urgently required."

Gates, who has published a book called How to Prevent the Next Pandemic, also urged the formation of a team of international experts, including epidemiologists and hardware and software designers, to identify threats and improve international coordination.

What are the effects and risks of this rumor?

Without scientific verification of the presence of a new variant, believing this rumor may lead to major panic and fear among governmental bodies and citizens, as well as followers of Bill Gates. In addition, users might be at a physical risk if they resort to taking and applying unnecessary precautions and measurements in the absence of any strain, or inaccurate medical solutions to new strains that are yet to be detected and studied by international health organizations.



THE FACTS

- In this context, the CEO of Moderna Inc., explained in an interview via Bloomberg, that there is the chance of one in five cases to detect a new variant of Covid-19 that is more dangerous than the current ones, and the people who are considered at risk are the elderly, as well as those with weak immunity. By extension, those patients are in need of yearly boosters to strengthen their immunity systems.
- Furthermore, in an interview with Sky News Arabia, a drug treatment advisor for infectious diseases, Dirar Al-Baawi, stressed that "Gates chose the exception, not the rule, and that all experts have been warning that there is less than a 5% chance of the emergence of a new, more deadly variant, which is an exception, and the evidence for this lies within the facts that all other variants that emerged after Omicron were considered weak."
- However, this cannot deny the possibility of the formation of future new mutations of Covid, and as long as this virus continues to spread among the population, mutations will continue to occur, and the delta and omicron variants will continue to evolve, according to a report prepared by Johns Hopkins Medicine University.
- Therefore, what was published by the American events page is only partially correct as it is based on scientific theories and not purely on scientific facts and documents. However, this statement cannot fully confirm the total absence of current new variants nor the impossibility of the formation of futures strains without conducting studies that include numbers and facts confirming the validity of this theory.

TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS



- Do not share any statement addressed by international influencer on health topics without referring and fact-checking the accuracy of the information from reliable sources.
- Do not consider opinion-based data as primary sources for health reporting and coverage while stressing on the difference between scientific theories and facts.
- Rely on scientific and medical studies and communiques conducted by international health organizations regarding any updates on Covid-19 variants and cases.
- Monitor on a day by day basis the latest changes happening within the health sector, particularly issues related to Covid-19

MEDIA PRINCIPLES



- Journalists should always carry the facts on any updates on Covid-19 within a specific media framework that ensures the spread of accurate data to the audience.
- Furthermore, journalists should always double check and verify all information that has been shared by public figures, having an impact on the audience's opinions and behaviors, regarding any health issues and topics



What are the people saying?

RUMOR #2

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There are risks of developing autoimmune diseases as a result of vaccination with either ‘Moderna’ and ‘Pfizer’ doses

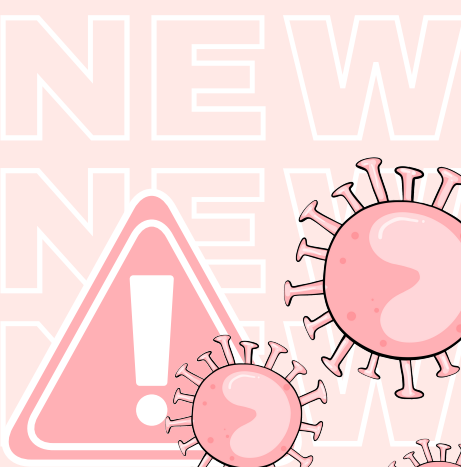


The News posted on the Website

On May 3rd, 2022, Al-Jareeda website published an article stating that “it is over” for whoever received the Moderna or Pfizer Covid-19 vaccines. The article was based on an interview conducted by the head of the Genome Engineering Laboratory, Pavel Volchkov, with the Russian newspaper, “Gazeta”, where he said that polyethylene Glycol (PEG) found in Moderna and Pfizer vaccines may cause future autoimmune diseases in vaccinated patients with the two indicated vaccine brands.

What are the effects and risks of this rumor?

Believing the claim that patients receiving the ‘Moderna’ and ‘Pfizer’ vaccines are highly at risk of future autoimmune diseases could **cause panic among the vaccinated people** who could get other vaccines and might refrain from getting vaccinated. There is no official data confirming any autoimmune diseases deriving from the Covid-19 vaccines. Only take the word of official international organizations regarding new data and medical discoveries on Covid vaccines, their effectiveness and side effects



THE FACTS

- According to the original article published in the Russian newspaper "Gazeta" on April 28, 2022, Volchkov said that millions who have been vaccinated with the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines may develop autoimmune diseases. He added, "The vaccinator won't be able to take other medications which also include the PEG as anti-cancer drugs, and hepatitis drugs."
- Within this context, Polyethylene glycol is a composition widely used as an additive in pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and food, as a treatment for cancer, and a component of the messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines, Moderna and Pfizer.
- The National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) published a study concluding that there are minor evidences until nowadays regarding that issue, yet it is possible that some cases of anaphylaxis after vaccination are due to the presence of polyethylene glycol in (mRNA) vaccines in patients who are allergic to this composition (PEG).
- Furthermore, the NCBI center added that it is significant to examine patients who suffer from unknown and severe allergic reactions to identify rare cases of patients suffering from particular allergies.
- From its perspective, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) clarified that people who are allergic to polyethylene glycol should not receive mRNA vaccines, and should consult their doctor about the possibility of receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.
- In addition, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) indicated that all people who suffer from severe sensitivity to any composition of the Covid-19 vaccine, should consult allergy experts and doctors.
- Therefore, according to official sources, what was published by the head of the Genome Engineering Laboratory, Pavel Volchkov, is incorrect. More accurately, only those who are allergic to polyethylene glycol may be affected by the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, and not everyone who has been vaccinated, as Volchkov mentioned.

TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS



- Verify and fact-check all updates on Covid vaccines while providing the complete information as confirmed by health care professionals and actors.
- Analyze the misinformation that can derive out of targeted campaigning and competition between Medical and pharmaceutical companies based on their advertising strategies and political propaganda.
- Rely on scientific studies conducted by international health institutions and organizations regarding any data or updated on vaccinations processes and side effects.
- Restrain in using and/or publishing misleading headlines on any health subject to reduce and limit future mental and physical risks among the public.

MEDIA PRINCIPLES



- Journalists should always build communication channels with health care actors and professionals to verify and acknowledge the latest data issuing any side effects and/or new information related to Covid vaccines.
- In addition, journalists should provide the complete and accurate picture of the recent vaccines' development and context that the audiences need. Therefore, Journalists should turn into a trusted expert source through their constant verification and fact-checking of Covid data-related from the competent international health organizations.



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