

Health misinformation on TikTok.

A Report for Governments and the WHO

Oct. 28, 2022

 **NewsGuard**

In September 2022, NewsGuard released a report which showed that TikTok’s search engine is pumping toxic misinformation to its young users, with **almost 20 percent of the videos presented in the top 20 search results containing misinformation on major news topics.**

In this new report focused on TikTok, we feature **false health claims that come up in searches on the platform.** Some of the videos featured are more than a year old. Yet, they all showed up within the first twenty results of the searches led by NewsGuard analysts on the platform in October 2022. In their searches, our analysts used terms that users could well search for when trying to confirm or disprove popular myths about COVID-19, vaccines, cancer and the monkeypox epidemic.

The falsehoods **in English, French, Italian and German** presented in this report had been **viewed 18.66 million times on TikTok as of October 2022.** Some videos featured **clips from websites that are rated Red by NewsGuard** because they are generally not reliable. **Many did not contain any warning,** while others (some of those sharing myths related to COVID-19 vaccines) only invited users to “Learn more about COVID-19 vaccines.”

Why does it matter? In September 2021, TikTok reported 1 billion active monthly users, **60 percent of whom are Generation Z** (less than 25 years old,) according to data from ad agency Wallaroo Media. And TikTok **surpassed Google as the most popular website worldwide in 2021,** with more and more people using it as a search engine.

Common health myths suggested in searches by NewsGuard's analysts on TikTok included:

- The spike protein in COVID-19 vaccines is toxic.
- Black seed oil cures cancer.
- Bras cause breast cancer.
- Vaccines are deadly.
- Bill Gates predicted the 2022 monkeypox outbreak.
- The monkeypox virus was manmade.
- Hydroxychloroquine is a proven COVID-19 treatment.

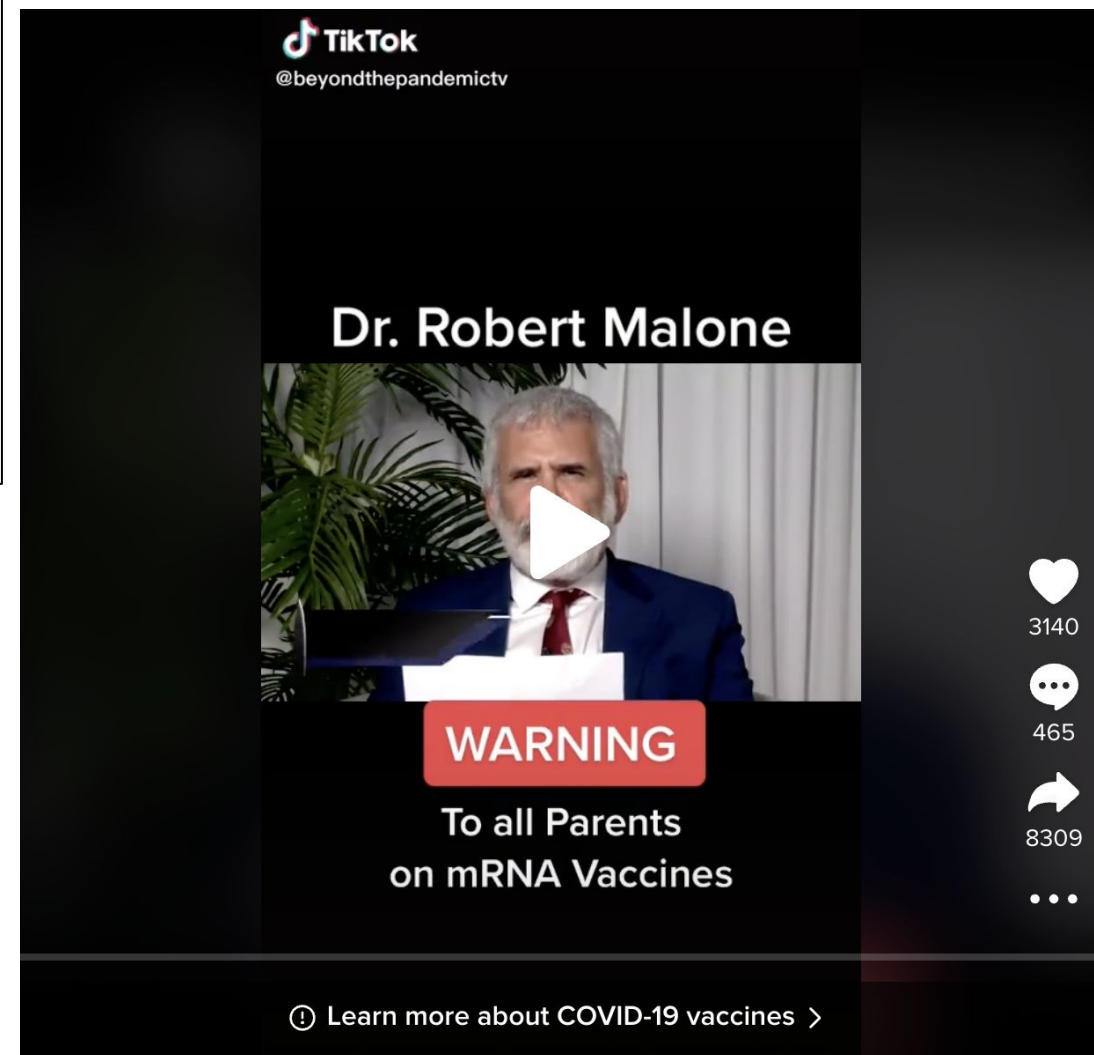
English-language health misinformation

False claim: The spike protein in COVID-19 vaccines is toxic.

- 3,140 likes
- 465 comments
- 8,309 shares

- Account whose description says “Breaking the silence, revealing true stories, and sharing solutions,” with 9,894 followers and 66,100 likes.

In this video, anti-vaccine advocate Dr. Robert Malone said that the COVID-19 vaccine "forces your child's body to make toxic spike proteins" which “often cause permanent damage in children's critical organs...” The video **did not have a specific warning, and only invited users to “Learn more about COVID-19 vaccines.”** In October 2022, it was the **second result for the search “mrna warning.”**





The same clip was shared by another TikTok account. The video also only invited users to **“Learn more about COVID-19 vaccines.”** It was the **11th result of a search for “covid19 truth” in October 2022.**

- 1,876 likes
- 230 comments
- 1,534 shares

- Account with 6,597 followers

Jan. 2022

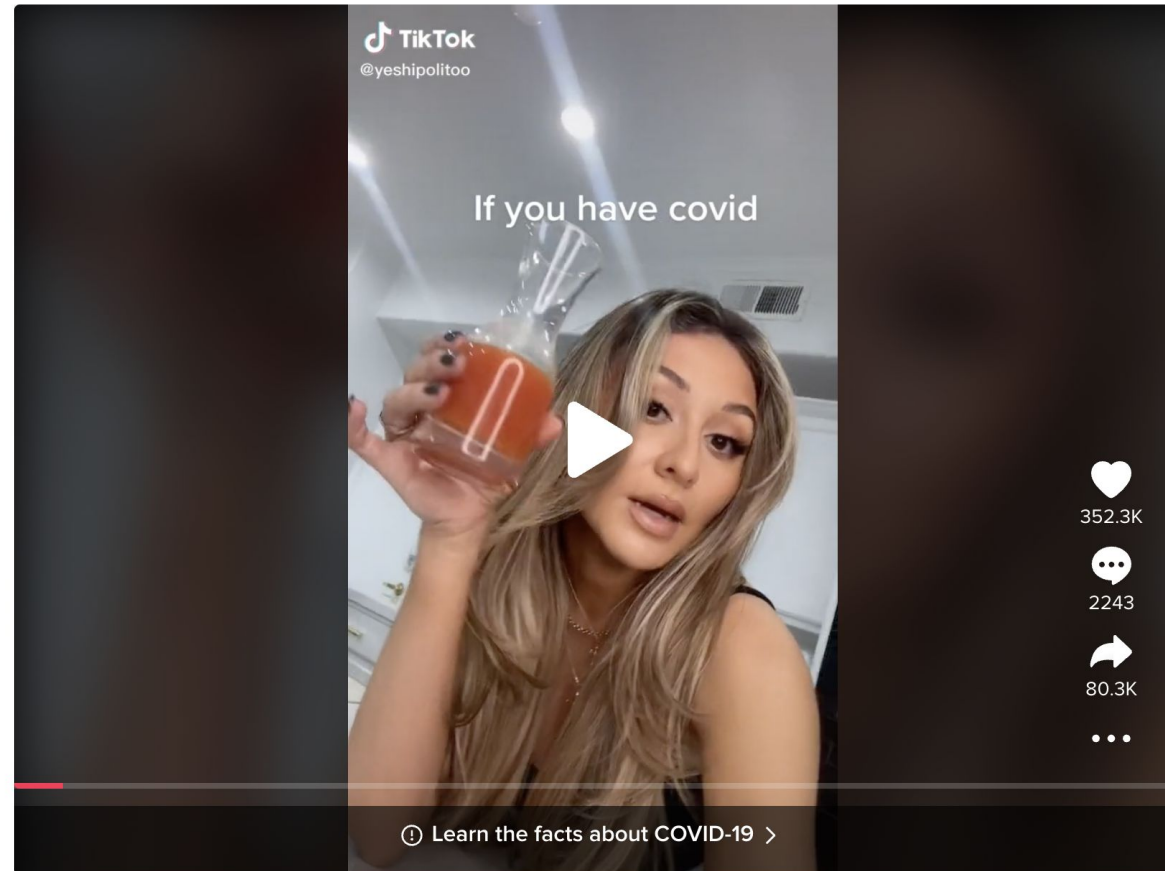
Jan. 2022

False claim: Lemon and hot water can cure COVID-19.

In this video, a woman said: “If you have COVID, listen up, I have a natural remedy for you,” as she proceeded to boil lemon juice, garlic, turmeric and other ingredients. **The video invited users to “learn the facts about COVID-19,” but did not warn them that it contained misinformation.** It was the **13th result for the search “covid cure” in October 2022.**

- 352,300 likes
- 2,243 comments
- 80,300 shares

Account with 250,400 followers and 13,1 million likes.



Covid remedy wellness shot 🦠 IB @madaicampos #covidremedy #omicron #covidhomeremedy

False claim: Black seed oil cures cancer.

- 511,000 likes
- 15,300 comments
- 251,700 shares

- Account with 287,100 followers and 732,700 likes, associated with a blog called “NothingIsIncurable.com.”



how to cure cancer #cancerfighter #cancersurvivor #cancer #womenshealth #naturalmedicine #naturalcures #fyp👏 #todayilearned

May 2022

The video included **no warning** of any kind. It was the **first result for “cancer cure” in October 2022.**

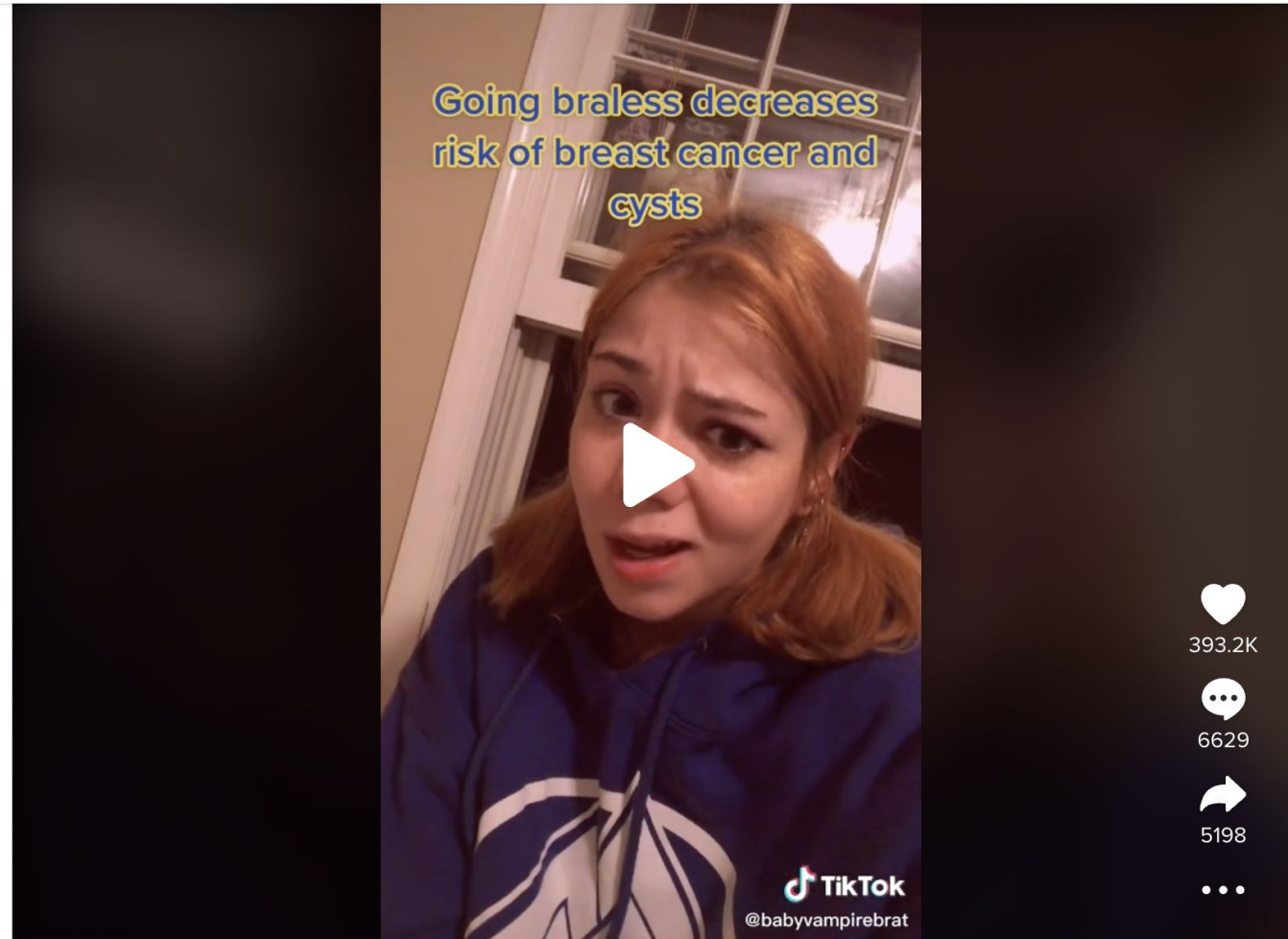
False claim: Bras cause breast cancer.

- 393,200 likes
- 6,629 comments
- 5,198 shares

- Account with 20,300 followers and 910,300 likes.

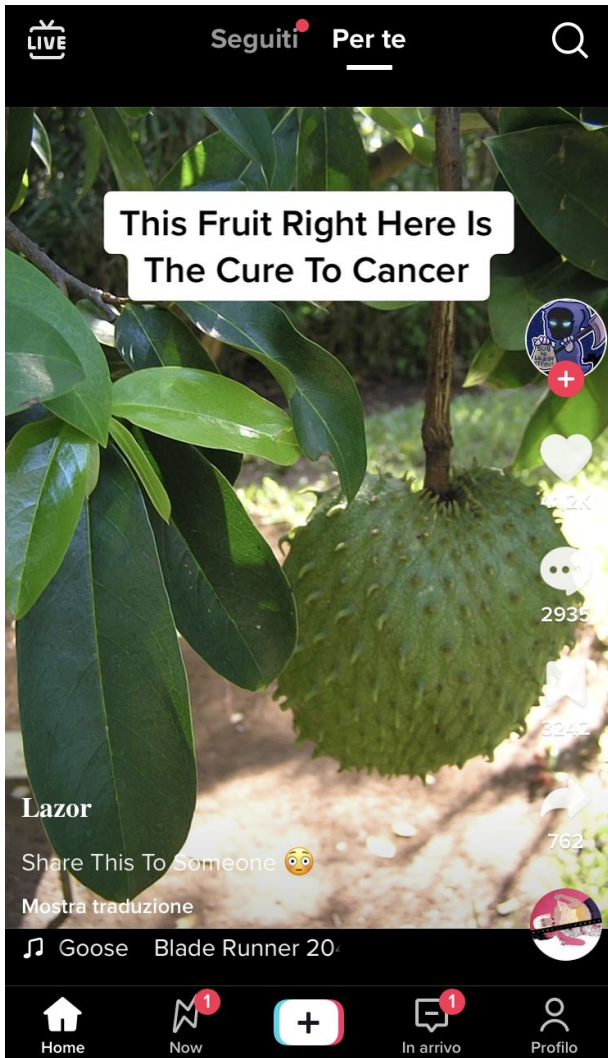
The video included **no warning of any kind. It was the 5th result of the search “do bras give you cancer” in October 2022.**

July 2022



But do whatever makes you feel most comfortable #hippie#nobra#zerowaste#eco#indie#vegan

False claim: Soursop cures cancer.



In this video titled “Things The World Doesn’t Want You To Know,” a narrator said: “This fruit right here is the cure to cancer. It’s called soursop and is known to be 10x more effective than normal treatments.” It contained **no warning from the platform**, and appeared as the **8th result for the search “cures for cancer” in Italian in October 2022.**

- 41,300 likes
- 2,928 comments
- 771 shares
- Account with 48,300 followers and 1,7 million likes.

May 2022

German-language health misinformation

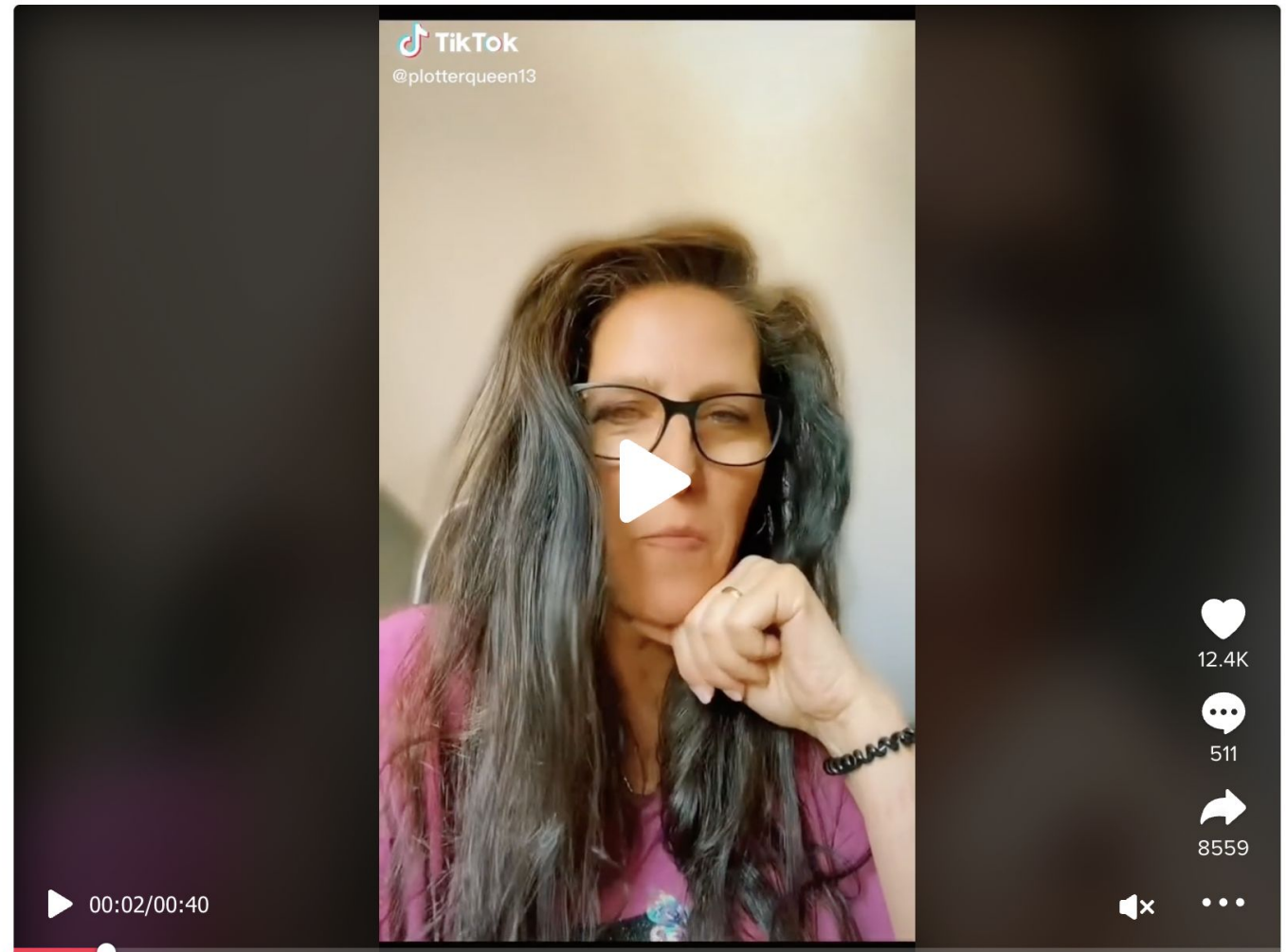
False claim: The monkeypox virus was manmade.

- 12,400 likes
- 511 comments
- 8,559 shares

- Account with 8,704 followers and 153,100 likes.

The video included **no warning of any kind**. In **October 2022**, it was the **19th result** when searching for “**monkeypox and pandemic**” in German.

June 2022



#affenpocken #interessant #fy #fyp #fypシ #fypage #foryou #foryoupage #soso #🤔 #hört #panikmache #pandemie



#naturheilkunde #krebs #cancer #detox # Entgiftung #ausleitung

July 2021

The video included **no warning** of any kind. In October 2022, it was the **first result of the search “cancer AND natural medicine” in German.**

False claim: An alkaline diet can treat or cure cancer and other bogus cancer cures.

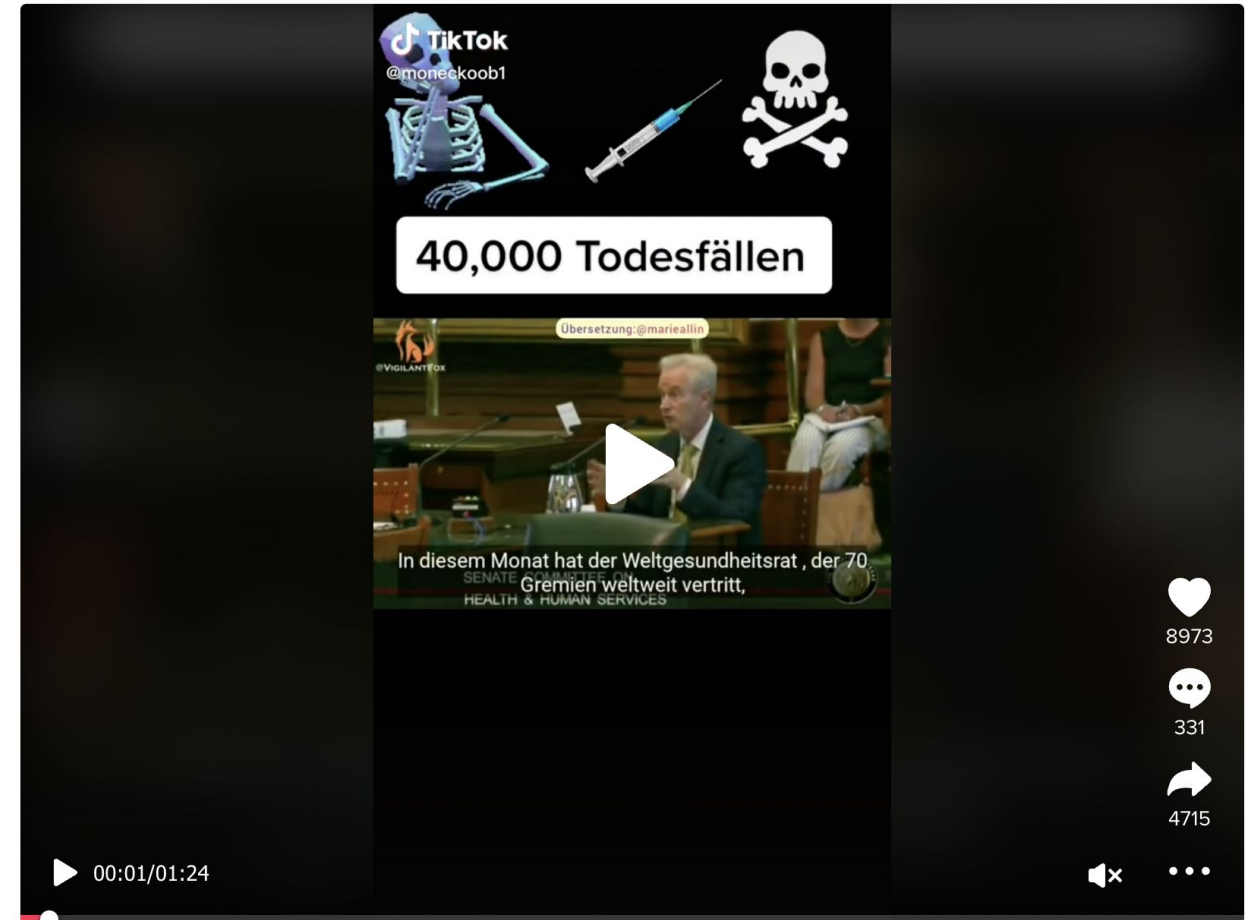
- 3,260 likes
- 154 comments
- 776 shares
- Account with 75,400 followers and 439,000 likes.

This TikTok, which was captioned “the most powerful natural remedies against cancer!!!” showed a video of a man listing Alkaline diet, curcumin and 40 degree sauna sessions as remedies against cancer, among others bogus cures.

False claim: COVID-19 vaccines have been recalled due to more than 40,000 deaths worldwide.

- 8,973 likes
- 331 comments
- 4,715 shares
- Account with 5,509 followers and 76,600 likes.

In fact, neither public health agencies nor manufacturers have recalled COVID-19 vaccines, and verified deaths resulting from the shots are exceptionally rare.



#impfung #corons #tod

July 2022

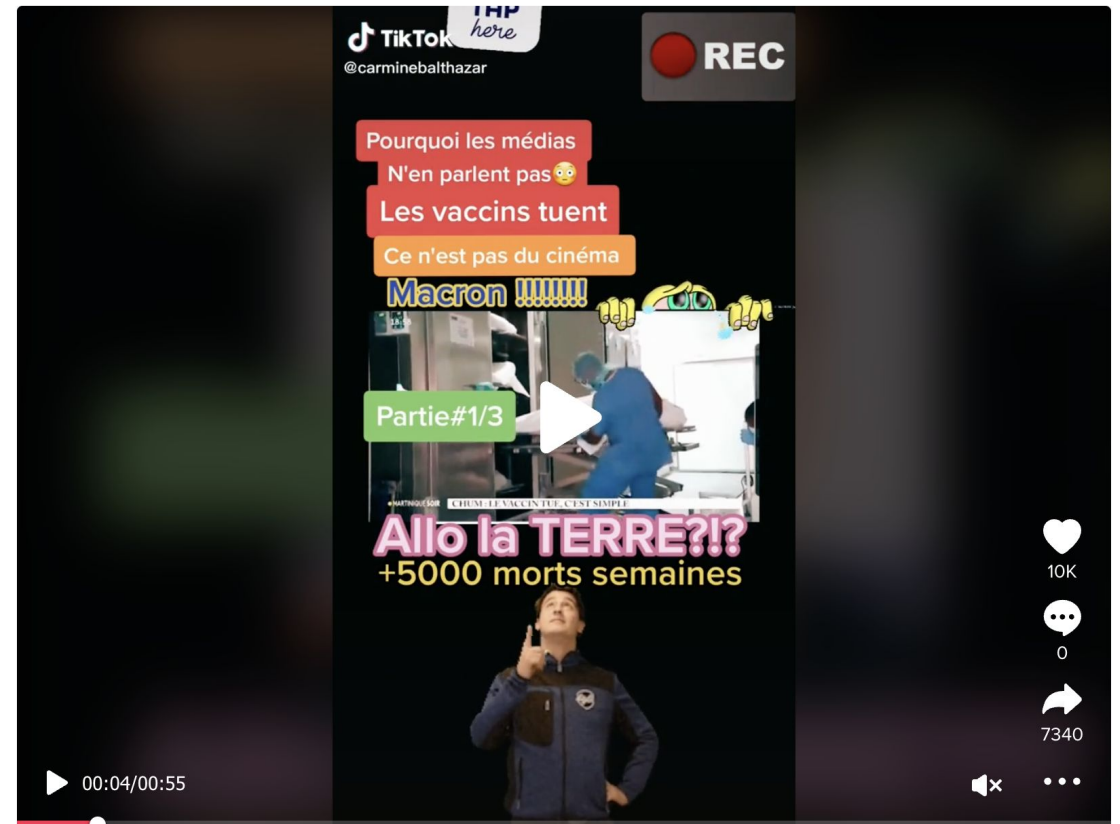
The video included **no warning** of any kind. In October 2022, it was the **first result when searching “vaccine and death” in German.**

French-language health misinformation

False claim: COVID-19 vaccines cause death.

- 10,000 likes
- 0 comment
- 7,340 shares
- Account with 17,600 followers and 191,300 likes.

The TikTok video, which was captioned “Why are the media not talking about it? Vaccines Kill. This is not fake. Macron!!! Hello? +5,000 deaths a week,” featured a compilation of news reports of people dying abruptly following vaccination, and a fabricated video showing French president Emmanuel Macron saying “The vaccine kills.”



#pourtoi#fypシ#médecinréaliste#virale#nonvacciné#enfinlavérité#nov2021baby#enfincvraiqueccalemot
#ilétaitemps#vaccinmortel#cavapasbien#vaccintue#zip#

Nov. 2021

The video included **no warning** of any kind. In **October 2022**, it was the **7th result** of a search for “vaccine and kills” in French.

False claim: COVID-19 vaccines include microchips to control people.

The video, which was captioned “The truth about vaccines part 1” featured Swiss anti-vaccine advocate Christian Tal Schaller saying that “there are microchips in the vaccines that you have no choice but to absorb and that will make you a captor for 5G... Once you have that vaccine, you will no longer have any freedom because the vaccines, through microchips, will link you to Mr. Bill Gates and his friends’ artificial intelligence and they will be able to do with you what they please.” The video invited users to “**Learn more about COVID-19 vaccines,**” but **contained no other warning.**



La vérité sur le vaccin / #covid #covid-19 #vaccin #vaccinocoronavirus #covid19

- 34,200 likes
- 2,010 comments
- 15,500 shares
- Account with 200,700 followers and 3,1 million likes.

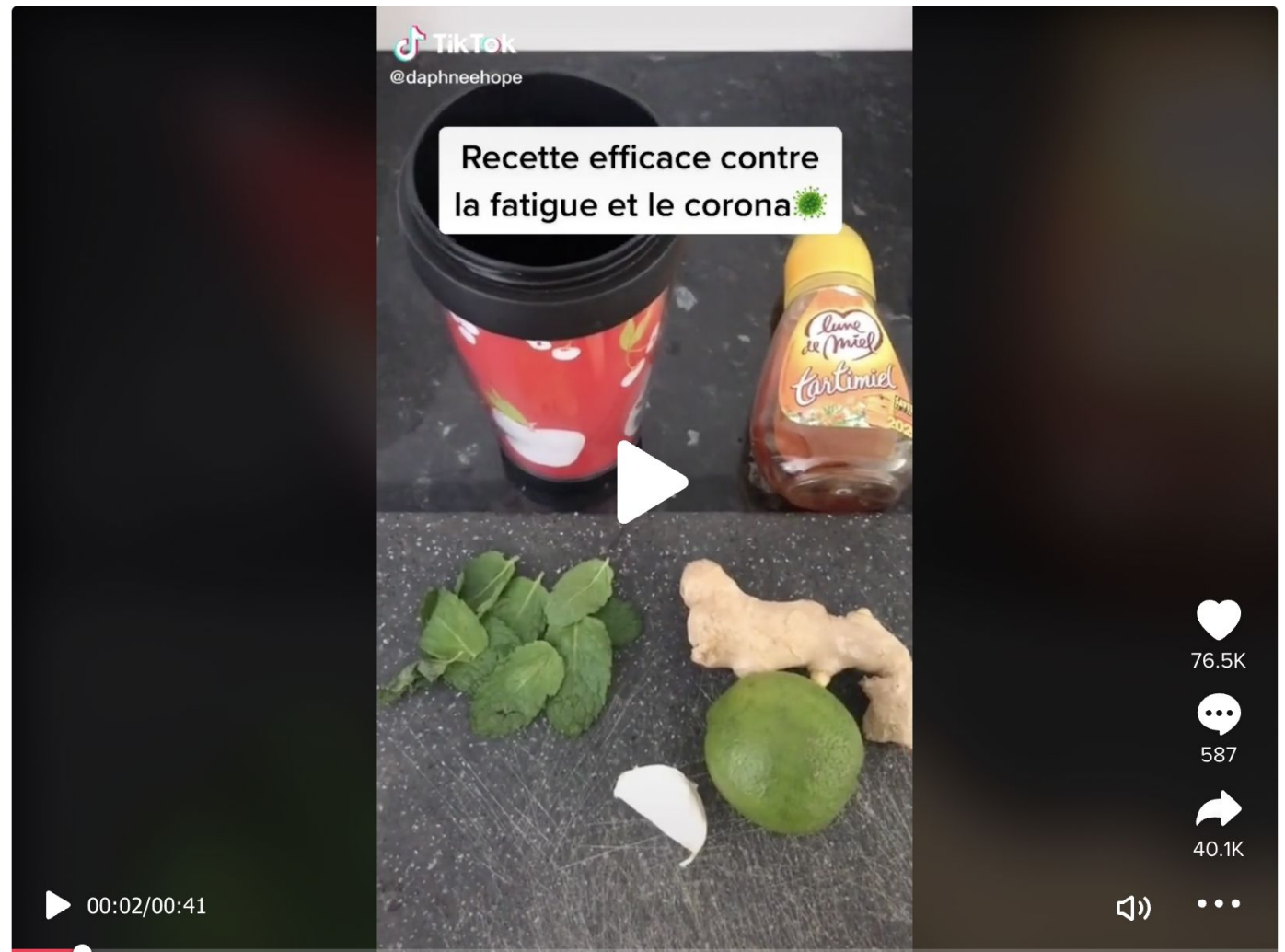
Nov. 2020

In October 2022, this video was the **second result for the search “vaccine truth” in French.**

False claim: Lemon and hot water can cure COVID-19.

This video, captioned “Efficient cure against fatigue and corona” showed a video of a woman preparing a drink containing lemon juice, ginger, garlic, honey and hot water. **The video did not contain any warning.** In **October 2022**, it was the **first result when searching for “efficient remedy corona” in French.**

- 76,500 likes
- 587 comments
- 40,100 shares
- Account with 250,600 followers and 2 million likes.



Recette efficace contre la fatigue et le corona #recette #fatigue #fypシ #menthe #citron #ail #gingembre #miel

June 2021

Italian-language health misinformation

False claim: The COVID-19 vaccines cause more severe cases of COVID-19.

The video accompanied by the text “likely cause of death following COVID vaccination,” featured a woman claiming that “suspected deaths [from the vaccine] could be caused by the ADE phenomenon, which is an inflammatory amplification of the antibody response.” The woman added that “it is very important to introduce the obligation to carry out a serological test to check antibody load before getting a vaccine.” The video **did not contain any warning.**

- 4,571 likes
- 633 comments
- 4,414 shares
- Account with 34,700 followers and 512,000 likes.



March 2021

In October 2022, this video was the **second result when searching “vaccine ade” in Italian.**

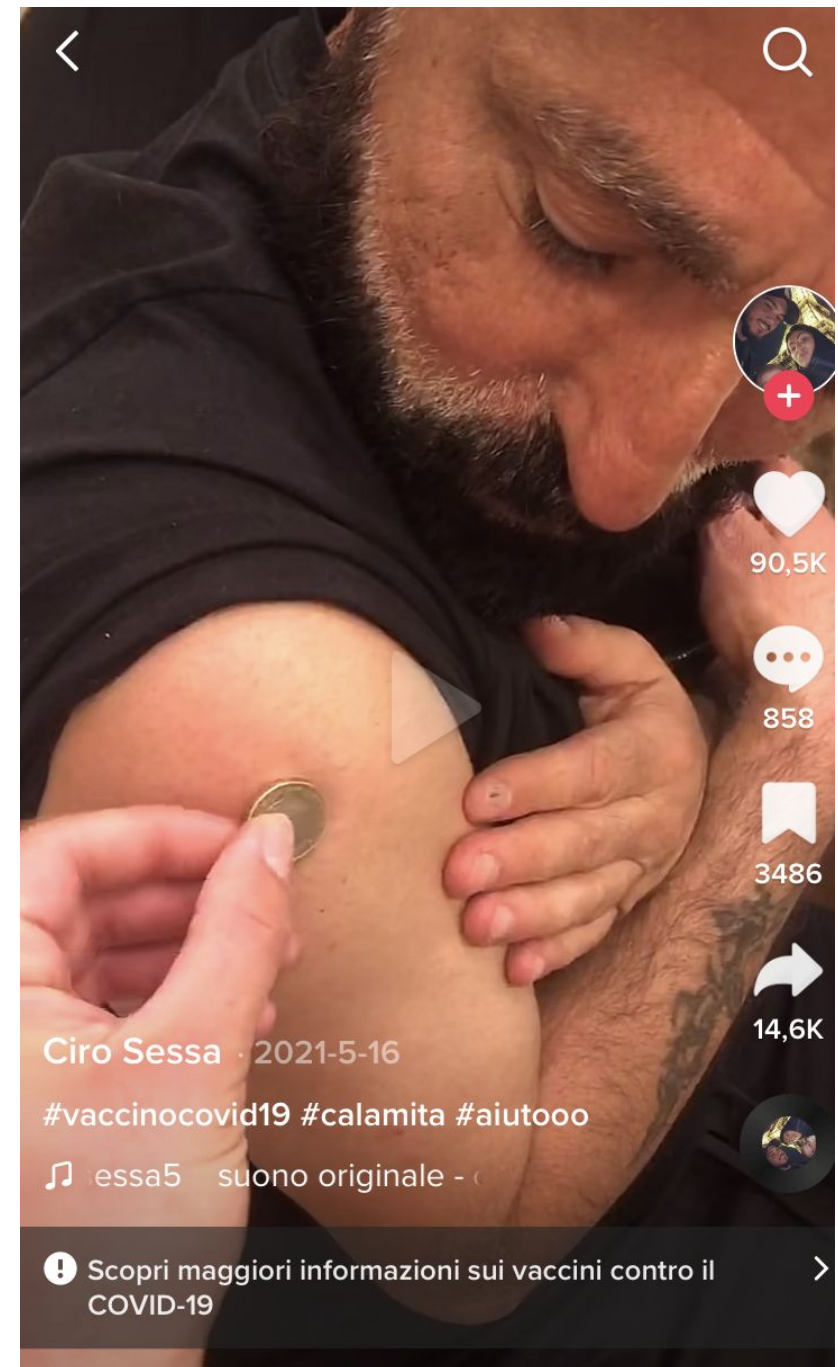
May 2021

False claim: Magnets stick to people's arms after they received COVID-19 vaccines, which proves that the vaccines contain magnetic ingredients such as microchips.

- 90,500 likes
- 854 comments
- 14,600 shares
- Account with 2,974 followers and 91,800 likes.

In October 2022, this video was the **11th result in a search for “covid vaccine magnet”** in Italian.

The video showed a man uncovering his right arm, while the man shooting the video said, “Just vaccinated” and stuck to his other arm a coin and a magnet. The video **did not contain any specific warning, and only invited users to “Learn more about COVID-19 vaccines.”**

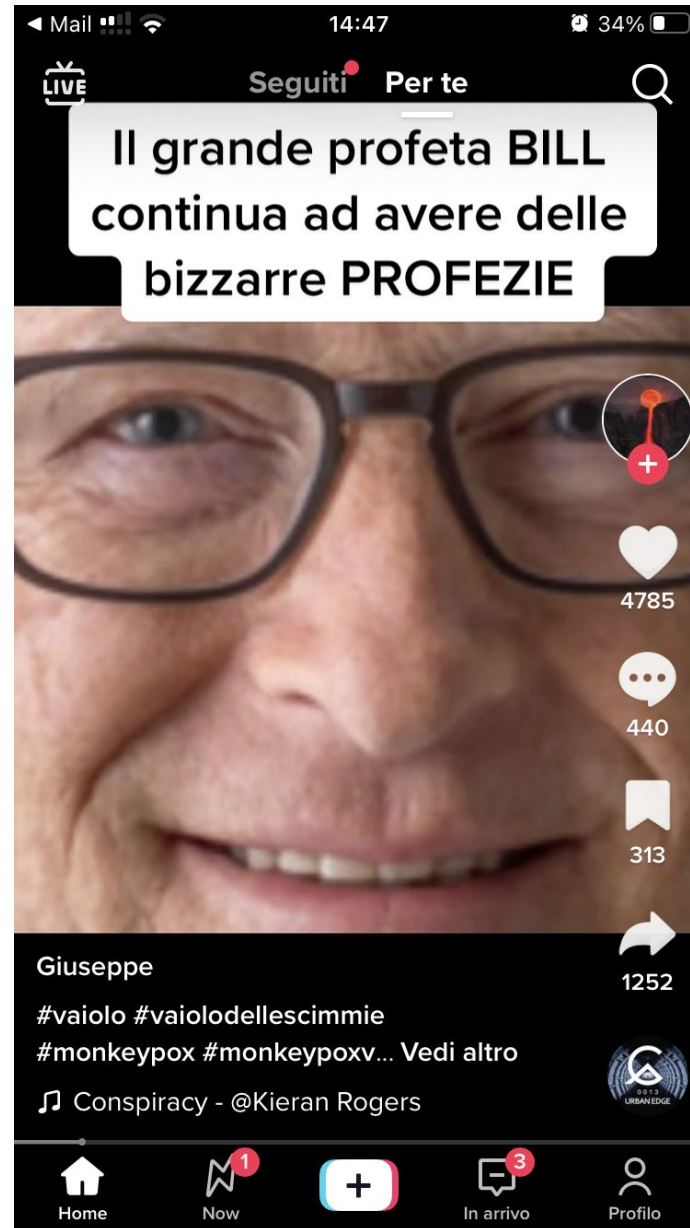


False claim: Bill Gates predicted the 2022 monkeypox outbreak.

- 4,784 likes
- 438 comments
- 1,252 shares
- Account with 19,900 followers and 241,800 likes.

This video was the **first result in a “Pox Bill Gates” search in Italian** in October 2022.

May 2022



The video showed clips from Contro.tv, an Italian video service that is rated Red (generally unreliable) by NewsGuard. In one of the featured clip, host Massimo Mazzucco showed a screenshot of an article titled “Monkeypox and benefactor Gates’ foresight” and said, “How does someone like him could think that it could be smallpox ... when you know that it is one of the things that have been eradicated and therefore are no longer around.” An on-screen text read, “The great prophet Bill Gates continues to make bizarre prophecies.” The video contained **no specific warning, and only invited users to “Learn the facts about monkeypox.”**

False claim: The COVID-19 vaccine will change your DNA.

The video featured **extracts from K1a.tv, a German-language Swiss TV news channel which was rated Red (generally unreliable) by NewsGuard.** In one of the segments, the TV host stated, “We report an urgent warning about an even greater danger, represented by a new type of vaccines against the coronavirus, because they directly modify human DNA.” An on-screen text read, “Urgent warning: the Coronavirus vaccine modifies the DNA.” The video contained **no warning.**

- 554 likes
- 22 comments
- 535 shares
- Account with 1,827 followers and 18,300 likes.



October 2021

In October 2022, this video was the **third result in a search for “Vaccine DNA” in Italian.**

This report was produced using NewsGuard's two proprietary datasets:

- The Misinformation Fingerprints dataset, a catalogue of data about top misinformation narratives, contains related keywords and search terms for all of the top misinformation and disinformation narratives spreading online - produced using human intelligence but designed for use with AI/ML/NLP tools to identify content matching specific false claims. NewsGuard analysts used the Misinformation Fingerprints dataset to identify relevant searches related to misinformation narratives about COVID-19, vaccines, and other health issues.
- NewsGuard's News Website Reliability Ratings, which consist of credibility ratings for over 8,400 news and information website that account for 95% of online engagement with news in the U.S., U.K., Canada, France, Germany, Austria and Italy. Each site's rating is based on nine basic, apolitical journalistic criteria. Based on the criteria, each site receives an overall designation of green (generally trustworthy) or red (generally not trustworthy) and a trust score of 0-100. NewsGuard's analyst used the News Website Reliability Ratings dataset to identify misinformation sources that appeared in the results for searches conducted as part of the analysis.
- Both datasets are available for licencing.
- Examples selected for the report represent an illustrative, but by no means exhaustive, list of false claims shared on TikTok and found when using the app as a search engine.

 **NewsGuard**