Fact Checking Information on Respiratory Infectious Diseases (RIDs)

Introduction

A quick internet search on respiratory infectious diseases (RIDs) (e.g., COVID-19, influenza, RSV) returns an overwhelming amount of information. Websites compete to be the first result you see and click, but the top search engine results are not necessarily the best. Not only can the internet be a source of misinformation, but other communication methods as well such as word of mouth (e.g., hearing something from your friend or family member).

How do we determine what is useful and accurate? What you found on the internet or heard from others may not be applicable to your specific workplace, or it could be misleading or misinterpreted. Follow these tips to fact check your information sources.

Three questions to ask

Before using respiratory infectious disease guidance information in your workplace, make sure it is trustworthy, applicable, and current. Here are three fact-checking questions you can ask.

1. Can the information source be trusted?

Always use official sources that are credible and trustworthy, such as those who:

- Are widely recognized as trusted subject experts

- Post guidance that is based on accepted scientific data and research

- Use a critical appraisal process to form their decisions

- Have the legal authority to set policies and write legislation

- Provide current and applicable legislation and guidance

- Are impartial and unbiased

- Are transparent about their purpose, mandate, and funding

- Provide links to other credible sources and references

- Are supported by other official sources

- Work to disprove unsubstantiated, harmful, and biased misinformation

Credible information sources include:

- Federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments

- Current legislation

- Public health organizations and authorities

- Enforcement officers and inspectors

- Global organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO)

- Journals that publish peer-reviewed scientific literature

- Hospitals and healthcare providers

- Certified occupational health and safety consultants and medical professionals

- Accredited universities

- Industry associations

Here are some trustworthy information sources for respiratory infectious diseases:

- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) (PHAC)

- [National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#) (NACI)

- [Health Canada](#)

- [World Health Organization](#) (WHO)

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC)

2. Does the information apply to my workplace?

Employers are responsible for protecting their workers when a disease can be contracted in the workplace. Not all diseases can reasonably be transmitted in every workplace. A risk assessment should reveal the occupational health hazards and recommend appropriate control measures.

Some factors that determine what control measures should be implemented:

- Presence of the health hazard in the workplace (e.g., poultry farmers may have greater exposure to avian influenza A(H5N1) than office workers)

- Worker characteristics (e.g., age, immunodeficiencies, pregnancy, etc.)

- Legislation, requirements, and guidance that apply to the workplace, sector, or industry (e.g., mandatory personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements in healthcare settings)

Always be sure that workplace-applicable information is being used for control measures.

3. Is the information current?

Check the original publication date, "date modified", or "date last updated" date. Respiratory infectious diseases are constantly being researched, and our knowledge of them and recommended control measures can change over time. For example, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses were required to have building occupancy limits and mask use rules, which were eventually lifted. Make sure to follow the current legislation since codes, acts, regulations, etc. are periodically updated.

Myth busting

Hoaxes, myths, and misinformation can spread rapidly on social media, undermining public health and safety efforts, and resulting in harm to people. This was observed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic when some of the following myths were debunked:

- 5G mobile networks did not spread COVID-19,
- Wearing a mask did not cause carbon dioxide intoxication or oxygen deficiency,
- Injecting or ingesting bleach did not cure COVID-19 (in fact, it is very dangerous to do so).

Be cautious with social media posts since they may not be from legitimate sources. You can help stop the spread of misinformation by:

- Not sharing rumours and speculation,
- Double-checking your facts,
- Using trusted sources to get news and information,
- Speaking up when you see false information being shared.

For further information on respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19, refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) .

Disclaimer: As public and occupational health and safety information may continue to change, local public health authorities should be consulted for specific, regional guidance. This information is not intended to replace medical advice or legislated health and safety obligations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency, and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.