



City Manager Office
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Item # 21

City of Santa Ana
20 Civic Center Plaza, Santa Ana, CA 92701
Staff Report
October 19, 2021

TOPIC: Resolution Denouncing COVID-19 Misinformation

AGENDA TITLE:

Resolution Denouncing COVID-19 Misinformation and its Detrimental Effects on Public Health

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Adopt a resolution denouncing COVID-19 misinformation and declaring the detrimental effects that COVID-19 misinformation has on public health.

DISCUSSION

The Coronavirus ("SARS-CoV-2" or "COVID-19") was first reported in December 2019 and was declared a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. Soon thereafter, in-person activities ceased and business and government operations shut down to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. As of October 12, 2021, the total worldwide COVID-19 cases have surpassed 237 million, with the worldwide death total exceeding 4.8 million. As public health and safety measures were put into place and governments began allowing in-person activities, work was simultaneously being done on a worldwide collaborative effort to create a vaccine to combat COVID-19.

On December 11, 2020, the COVID-19 vaccine created by Pfizer-BioNTech was granted an emergency use authorization ("EUA") to be administered to individuals 16 years of age or older. EUAs are used by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration during public health emergencies to provide access to medical products that may be effective in preventing, diagnosing, or treating a disease, provided that the FDA determines that the known and potential benefits of a product, when used to prevent, diagnose, or treat the disease, outweigh the known and potential risks of the products. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was the first to receive this EUA authorization, with the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines following shortly thereafter. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was fully approved by the FDA on August 23, 2021 and is currently the only vaccine to receive that approval. It is important that all eligible individuals receive the COVID-19 vaccine to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

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As of October 12, 2021, 182 million residents in the United States are fully vaccinated, which equates to 55.6 percent of the total U.S. population. Public health data shows that although there was an all-time high vaccination distribution rate in mid-April 2021, the number of vaccines administered since has continuously declined. The lack of increase in the vaccination rate for the U.S. population may stem from “health misinformation” regarding COVID-19 and the vaccine. The U.S. Surgeon General defines health misinformation as “information that is false, inaccurate, or misleading according to the best available evidence at the time.”

Combating health misinformation has been a pressing issue for government agencies, particularly surrounding the topic of the COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals may prefer to refuse the COVID-19 vaccine because of rumors and misconceptions about the vaccines that they have found through social media, among other platforms. Research has shown that being exposed to information regarding COVID-19 on social media has shown a higher susceptibility to misinformation about the virus and vaccine in places such as Ireland, the U.K., and the U.S. To add to this exposure to health misinformation, scholars at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health note how members of the public have difficulty identifying trusted sources in order to fact-check messages they encounter, and this is further supplemented by these same people not trusting governmental websites as a verification source once exposed to health misinformation. Government agencies, including local governments such as the City of Santa Ana, have an interest in ensuring the health and safety of their residents by combating health misinformation—even more so during a global pandemic.

Resolution Denouncing COVID-19 Misinformation

At the request of Mayor Sarmiento, staff has prepared a resolution denouncing COVID-19 health misinformation and declaring its detrimental effects that health misinformation has on public health. The resolution, if adopted, would commit the City to the following:

1. The City will use all appropriate resources to combat the sharing of COVID-19 misinformation, such as by sharing scientifically-based factual information only about COVID-19.
2. The City will use digital literacy education to teach residents how to identify misinformation.
3. The City will prepare a written letter to the County of Orange Board of Supervisors to request that they similarly commit to combating health misinformation to curb the spread of falsehoods that threaten the health and safety of Orange County residents.
4. The City will assist the Orange County Health Care Agency to disseminate accurate information about COVID-19 and the vaccine.

The resolution (Exhibit 1) is attached for consideration by the City Council.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

There is no environmental impact associated with this action.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

EXHIBIT(S)

1. Resolution

Submitted By: Kristine Ridge, City Manager

Approved By: Kristine Ridge, City Manager