

# Top 10 Junk Science and Bogus Health Claims ACSH Debunked in 2019



By Alex Berezow, PhD — December 26, 2019

*As is the case every year, 2019 was full of junk science, bogus health claims, misinformation, and outright lies. We debunked scores of them this year, but the following list is what we consider the top 10.*



Credit: John Stephen Dwyer/Wikipedia  
[1]

We are swimming in an ocean of B.S. And despite the fact that more people have access to more knowledge and information than ever before in human history, the problem seems to be getting worse. Last year, [nearly half](#) [2] of the top 100 most shared health stories included at least partially misleading information.

The upside, of course, is that we'll always be employed. Here are the top 10 junk science and bogus health claims we debunked in 2019:

**10. Tax on sugar-sweetened beverages only shrinks your wallet.** Ostensibly in an effort to combat obesity, several cities passed a tax on sugary beverages. However, a [study](#) [3] concluded that these taxes do nothing of the kind because consumption was estimated to decrease by merely 5 calories per day per person. At that rate, it would take 3 years to lose half a pound of body weight. To put that number into perspective, your weight [fluctuates naturally by 5 to 6 pounds per day](#) [4], due largely to fluid intake and excretion.

**9. *Scientific American* is brain-dead.** A once venerable scientific publication for the masses is

now untrustworthy clickbait. Just this year, SciAm claimed that [vegetables were becoming toxic, sugary snacks](#) [5]; claimed that [5G wireless technology is unsafe](#) [6]; and published a [conspiratorial rant mocking experts in the "medical establishment."](#) [7] Simply put, SciAm's content is no longer reliable.

**8. Red meat was good, then bad, now good again.** Because it relies almost entirely on dubious food frequency questionnaires, the science of nutrition often serves up contradictory advice. Some days wine cures cancer; other days it causes cancer. The same back-and-forth applies to red meat, which has been demonized in recent years. But a new [study](#) [8] in 2019 showed that reduced red meat consumption is associated with only small health gains, meaning that red meat is back on the menu. Incidentally, this mirrors what ACSH has long said, namely, that you can eat whatever you want, just as long as you do so in moderation.

**7. *Dark Waters* is *Erin Brockovich* all over again.** Mark Ruffalo, who played the Hulk and is also a 9/11 truther, stars in a new movie called [Dark Waters](#) [9] which tells the story of how a lawyer hounded DuPont over a type of chemical that has been accused of causing cancer. Just like *Erin Brockovich*, the movie pits a "heroic" lawyer against a "greedy" company while throwing scientific facts and nuance under the bus.

**6. Some celebrities and politicians keep encouraging people not to get vaccinated.** It's been said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Thus, you would think that all young people would be encouraged to get the HPV vaccine, which prevents cervical cancer, but you would be wrong. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. -- an anti-vaxxer and a scourge on public health -- [opposes the vaccine](#) [10], along with the influenza and measles vaccines. Soon-to-be former Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin [bragged about skipping the chickenpox vaccines for his kids](#) [11], even though they are now susceptible to shingles later in life.

**5. Anti-vaping hysteria is unwarranted.** When reports first surfaced of people getting sick and even dying from vaping, we were quite suspicious. E-cigarettes have been around for several years, and severe health problems hadn't been reported until recently. We [wrote at the time](#) [12] that the illnesses were probably due to contamination and/or use of illicit black market products. As it turned out, we were correct, and it took the CDC and media a while to catch up. (See our [vaping Q&A](#) [13].)

**4. Restricting prescription opioids isn't saving lives.** In response to the opioid crisis, policies have been aimed at restricting opioid prescriptions. But this hasn't worked. Opioid overdose deaths, generally due to fentanyl and/or heroin, have increased while opioid prescriptions have decreased. Also, pain patients are suffering because they have found it increasingly difficult to obtain the drugs they need to function. Dr. Josh Bloom has been a [tireless advocate on their behalf](#) [14].

**3. Businesses keep profiting from scientific illiteracy.** Whole Foods sells both [nitrate supplements and nitrate-free meat](#) [15]. The chemicals on Panera Bread's "no-no list" are [also in the food it sells](#) [16]. A company called Molekule is trying to [scare you into buying an air purifier you don't need](#) [17]. Likewise, websites like Mercola.com publish pseudoscientific articles that go viral. This [drives traffic to their websites, where users are sold bogus health products](#) [18]. The only

reason these companies can get away with this is because the majority of the public is scientifically illiterate. To fight back, we must wise up!

**2. The U.S. Surgeon General promotes dubious research.** U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams touted an [awful study](#) [19] from Iran that allegedly showed that Tylenol was just as good at managing post-operative pain as opioids. (It did not show that.) [Our debunking of the research](#) [20] led him to backpedal. Unfortunately, he didn't learn his lesson, and he subsequently [promoted questionable vaping research](#) [21].

**1. Monsanto plaintiff's attorney charged with extortion.** It is illegal to extort money, even if it's from a company you don't like. One of the lead plaintiffs' attorneys suing Monsanto found this out the hard way when he was arrested for the attempted extortion of \$200 million from another company involved in the production of Roundup. As it so happens, the attorney was also giving [marching orders to the anti-GMO activist group U.S. Right to Know](#) [22], providing Exhibit A for our strong conviction in the existence of the [activist-legal complex](#) [23].

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- [2] <https://healthfeedback.org/the-most-popular-health-articles-of-2018-a-scientific-credibility-review/>
- [3] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/10/31/taxing-sugar-sweetened-beverages-reduces-your-wallet-not-waistline-14371>
- [4] <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/how-often-should-you-step-on-the-scale/>
- [5] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/08/20/scientific-american-says-vegetables-are-toxic-sugary-snacks-14234>
- [6] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/10/21/scientific-american-says-5g-dangerous-vegetables-are-junk-food-14351>
- [7] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/12/02/scientific-american-publishes-conspiratorial-anti-medical-rant-aimed-dr-jennifer-gunter-14431>
- [8] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/10/08/red-meat-controversy-wheres-beef-14318>
- [9] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/11/20/what-hulk-911-truther-mark-ruffalo-testifies-congress-science-14416>
- [10] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/03/25/robert-f-kennedy-jr-helping-spread-flu-and-cervical-cancer-13906>
- [11] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/03/21/ky-gov-bevin-condemns-his-9-kids-shingles-rejecting-chickenpox-vaccine-13898>
- [12] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/09/10/everything-goes-pot-myths-are-driving-fda-cdc-vaping-policy-14278>
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[21] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/11/13/surgeon-general-endorses-dubious-research-again-time-vaping-14397>

[22] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/12/19/usrtk-carey-gillam-collaborated-monsanto-plaintiff-attorney-charged-extortion-14467>

[23] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/12/17/activist-legal-complex-will-destroy-american-science-and-industry-14463>