

Using the Internet to find vaccine fear-mongering

By *ACSH Staff* — May 13, 2013

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ACSH has been in the forefront of countering specious fears about vaccines that MMR shots cause autism, polio vaccines sterilize Muslim or Hindu girls, or that the HPV vaccine will lead to promiscuity, for example. Now some researchers have developed a surveillance system, reported in [The Lancet](#) [1], to track vaccine mentions, and used it to assess public opinion in 144 countries.

Led by Dr. HJ Larson of the London School of Hygiene, the investigators used the HealthMap automated data collection system to monitor online reports about vaccines, vaccination programs, and vaccine-preventable diseases. They then analyzed data from 10,380 reports generated between May 1, 2011 and April 30, 2012.

Of these reports, the authors found that 69 percent were positive or neutral, and 31 percent were negative about vaccines. Of the negative reports, 24 percent dealt with impacts on vaccine programs and disease outbreaks, 21 percent with beliefs, awareness, and perceptions, 16 percent with vaccine safety, and 16 percent with vaccine delivery programs.

The authors conclude Real-time monitoring and analysis of vaccine concerns over time and location could help immunization programs to tailor more effective and timely strategies to address specific public concerns.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross comments, Education and appropriate targeting of positive information about vaccines is crucial to halting the spread of diseases such as polio, which could have been eradicated by now if not for fear mongering. While this surveillance system will not, by itself, halt inaccurate vaccine-related myths, it will allow provision of accurate information to areas that are most vulnerable to misinformation.

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[1] <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099%2813%2970108-7/fulltext>