

Committee to Protect Health Care: Wisconsin physicians, health experts correct the record on Sen. Johnson's 2021 pandemic statements

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MILWAUKEE — As Wisconsinites prepare to enter 2022 and a third year of the pandemic and Omicron threatens to crush health care systems, doctors across the state want to ensure that residents have the correct, updated information about COVID-19 and how to protect themselves and their loved ones. Some of the statements made by Wisconsin's U.S. Senator Ron Johnson throughout the year have been proven to be misleading, and physicians want to firmly correct the record amid the surges of the Delta and Omicron [variants](#) throughout the state and country.

Earlier this month, Sen. Ron Johnson [falsely stated](#) in a town hall event that a "standard gargle" of mouthwash "has been proven to kill the coronavirus" or "may reduce viral replication" to help protect from a serious surge of COVID-19 cases. "Why not try all these things?" he said, [adding mouthwash to a list of unproven COVID-19 cures](#) and treatments such as supplements of Vitamin D, Vitamin C and zinc.

"As COVID-19 continues to spread like wildfire, it's imperative that people get the facts about how to actually protect themselves, such as using proven measures like vaccinations, not using mouthwash as Sen. Ron Johnson suggested," Dr. Karen Chao, Milwaukee pediatrician, and member of the Committee to Protect Health Care. "Mouthwash is not intended to treat or prevent COVID-19 — it should be used only for standard hygiene purposes. As physicians, we remain clear that vaccines are the best tools we have to prevent COVID-19 infection and serious illness."

Earlier this year, [YouTube suspended](#) Sen. Ron Johnson for a week after he shared a clip touting the supposed benefits of hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin to fight COVID-19. “Whether it’s hydroxychloroquine, whether it’s ivermectin, whether it’s multi-drug treatments for early treatment of COVID, I think that is one of the real blunders of the previous administration and the current administration and our health agencies in completely ignoring — actually, not only ignoring, but working against robust research, robustly exploring the use of cheap, generic drugs that can be repurposed for early treatment of covid,” Johnson said.

Leading to another suspension, Johnson incorrectly claimed that the COVID-19 vaccines are unsafe. Inaccurately [citing numbers](#) of vaccine injuries, he said, “The updated figures today are 17,619.” He went on to say, “That is 225 times the number of deaths in just a 10-month period versus an annual figure for the flu vaccine. These vaccine injuries are real.” Johnson was misinterpreting numbers from the self-reporting [Vaccine Adverse Effective Reporting System](#) (VAERS) database. According to the CDC, the numbers can be misreported and “do not necessarily mean that a vaccine caused a health problem.”

Dr. Thomas Hunt, family medicine specialist in Durand, and member of the Committee to Protect Health Care, said, “As we continue to battle this pandemic and new variants, Johnson’s misinterpretation of data and suggestions that the COVID-19 vaccine has caused a large number of injuries are wrong and could mislead people deciding about whether or not to get vaccinated. VAERS is not an official, vetted report and is not designed to determine if a vaccine causes a health problem. Physicians across Wisconsin remain clear: Vaccines are highly effective and extremely safe.”

Sen. Ron Johnson claimed earlier this year that there’s a risk of death if individuals who previously tested positive for COVID-19 receive a vaccine. He [incorrectly claimed](#), “I’m talking to doctors who have, since day one, been concerned about vaccinating people who’ve already had COVID, because you die, not of COVID, you die of the immune system overreaction to COVID.” And when asked whether he’d been vaccinated, Johnson [responded](#), “No, I had COVID, so I don’t believe, you know, I think that probably provides me the best immunity possible, actually having had the disease.” That was despite the fact that doctors, public health experts, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention urge residents to get vaccinated even if they have already had COVID-19.

“As doctors, we are not at all concerned about vaccinating people who’ve already

had COVID-19,” said Dr. Ann Helms, Milwaukee critical care neurologist and Wisconsin State Lead for the Committee to Protect Health Care. “We know that immunity from being infected tends to decrease significantly over time. Vaccination, even in those who have already had COVID, is essential to create lasting immunity and for controlling spread of the virus. An overreaction of the immune system when you get COVID-19 can lead to serious illness or death. This does not happen with vaccines, even in those who have previously had COVID. And since we know immunity from the vaccines is far stronger than that from infection, we enthusiastically recommend that all Wisconsinites step up and get vaccinated.”