

DAILY COVID-19 Misinformation and Scam Report

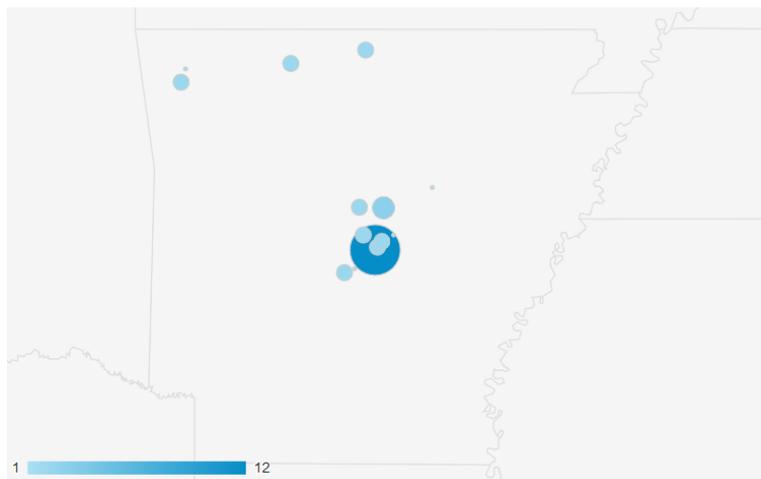
Date: 04/07/2020

Executive Summary

As of April 7, 2020, COSMOS has added 275 entries of misinformation, scams, and fake media to the database. Over the past 24 hours, 10 new cases of misinformation and scams were reported by the public of which 3 are Arkansas specific. Website visitor trends show that most users originate from more densely populated areas of the state.

Key Insights

1. Over the past 24 hours, our COVID-19 website has received traffic from 43 users in eight states in addition to Arkansas. Within Arkansas use originated from within 10 cities, with Little Rock being the most frequent city.
2. The past 24 hours have shown an increase in information activity in the Central Arkansas region focused on misinformation circulating via social media. These activities demonstrate that urban areas (e.g. Little Rock) are being exposed more to misinformation and scams as they remain vulnerable populations.
3. Over the past 24 hours, the top sources being used to spread COVID-19 misinformation include:
 - a. Facebook (via both their main application and their Messenger app)
 - b. YouTube
 - c. Twitter
 - d. Blogs: humansarefree.com, wakingtimes.com, news-for-friends.de, connectiv.events, davidicke.com
4. Of additional interest, users of our site not only originated from within the United States, but also from within Singapore.



Cosmos.ualr.edu/covid-19: Distribution of the 22 Arkansas visitors from April 6 - 7, 2020.

Top three misinformation themes - “5G causes coronavirus (COVID-19)” - “The coronavirus was created in a lab” - “The coronavirus was created as a bioweapon”

Arkansas-specific cases - Within the past 24 hours, three Arkansas-specific cases have been identified.

1) There is a suspicious direct mail item being circulated via the US postal service (see image below) that asks residents to provide their personal information that promises to give the recipient more benefits. The mailer wants recipients to return a form filled out with name, address, age, and phone number. This suspicious mailer has a return address of: Processing Center P.O. Box 2968 Thomasville, GA 31799-9966.



2) An already debunked fake audio clip originally spread throughout Singapore back as early as (if not earlier) March 28, 2020 is currently being spread by Arkansas citizens via messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. In the fake audio clip, the speaker claims that citizens need to hold their mail in plastic bags for at least a day before they open it because a postal worker who had the coronavirus was caught spitting on letters.

3) The false claim that "Walmart has adopted 'staggered shopping' based on age" is spreading in a viral post via Facebook. The posts falsely claim that Walmart, in response to the coronavirus pandemic, has instituted a “staggered shopping schedule” that allows only certain age groups on specific days. The truth is that the store has started a weekly “senior shopping event,” but no other restrictions based on age.

Recommendations - Increase messaging (mass media) via local governments and news outlets about testing, CDC guidelines, phishing emails, and scam direct mailings via the USPS. Establish a radio broadcast (AM/FM) with the same information to reach rural communities. Advertise these mediums on digital billboards, etc.