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March 4, 2019

Ben Silberman
Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Pinterest
808 Brannan St.
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Silberman:

As President of the American Academy of Pediatrics, my number one mission is to keep children healthy. I write to you today to request your partnership in confronting a public health crisis threatening the health of children across the country: the spread of vaccine misinformation online.

Right now, pediatricians are watching our worst fears realized as measles outbreaks spread across the country. A potentially deadly disease—one we had eliminated with an effective vaccine—is endangering entire communities. My home state of Washington has declared a public health emergency, and I fear others will follow.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has a long record of advocating for vaccines. Pediatricians talk with families one-on-one every day about immunizations in our clinics, hospitals, and communities. But these strategies are not enough. Increasingly, parents are turning online to gather information and form opinions about their child's health.

The Internet and social media offer tremendous value as tools to help parents make informed decisions about their children's health. But we must ensure that the decisions are indeed informed, with credible, scientific information from trusted sources. The science is sound: vaccines are safe, vaccines are effective, and vaccines save lives. And yet, long-debunked theories claiming the opposite proliferate online.

News reports demonstrate that parents have been targeted with advertisements and sponsored posts by fringe groups intent on misleading them during a key moment of vulnerability in their lives. Thank you for your commitment to limit vaccine misinformation on Pinterest, where parents were encountering inaccurate and misleading information.

On a topic like vaccines, misinformation can be deadly. The consequences play out offline, where immunocompromised children, and children too young to be vaccinated, are put at grave risk of contracting measles or other diseases when they enter the same room as an unvaccinated child who picked up the virus. The doctor's office, a school classroom, movie theaters, amusement parks – these places are part of the routines of childhood, but they also become potential epicenters for rapid, mass exposure.


Censoring content is not the answer. We need more communication, not less. Pediatricians talk with families every day about their children's health, and we respect parents who disagree with us. We have found that continuing to talk with parents who are hesitant about vaccines is the best way to bring them closer to a decision to vaccinate their child. The same is true in the social media space. I am grateful for the steps Pinterest has taken to limit the amount of vaccine misinformation on your platform, but limiting the availability of any information about vaccine safety is not the answer long-term.

Smart science needs to be elevated and shared, and social media platforms are uniquely primed to do so. We have an opportunity—and in my view, an obligation—to work together to solve this public health crisis. It will take commitments across all sectors—local and federal government, the medical and public health community, and the technology industry—to do so. Pediatricians are ready and willing to work with you to ensure that facts are prioritized over misinformation, and to build trust in vaccinations and their protection.

We represent 67,000 pediatrician members across the country with at least one chapter in every state. Pediatric check-ups are the primary place children receive routine immunizations. Our members are also engaged and active in conversations about child health online and are regularly cited as being credible sources of information that parents trust. We understand the science and how to communicate it.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss how we can best work together. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kyle E. Yasuda, MD, FAAP". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kyle E. Yasuda, MD, FAAP
President

KY/jp