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Combating Public Vaccine Misinformation Through an Educational Podcast for Middle and High School Students

Vincent Nocella
vincentnocella1998@gmail.com

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VINCENT NOCELLA (Biological Sciences)

Combating Public Vaccine Misinformation Through an Educational Podcast for Middle and High School Students

Sponsor: Andrea Rusnock (History)

Current health education classes, in both middle and high schools, rarely include vaccine education in their curricula for adolescents and their parents. Due to this absence of information about immunizations, adolescents and their parents are at a disadvantage when deciding how to manage their health appropriately. Parents can be misinformed about vaccine safety, efficacy, and the overall immunization schedule. Increased internet use and accessibility has made combating misinformation difficult to say the least. Including immunization in school health education would provide an important source for accurate information about vaccine benefits, herd immunity criteria, and how/where to identify credible resources for further questions and concerns pertaining to vaccines. One way to include education about immunization is through podcasts. I have developed a podcast which discusses the history of vaccine education in schools and highlights critical misinformation entrenched in today's public mindset. This podcast brings attention to the increasing skepticism around the controversial MMR and HPV vaccines, the urgency of the immunization schedule, and mentions an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic and the immunizations available to protect against it. The goal is to encourage U.S. middle/high schools health education classes to include the podcast as a homework assignment for students. Students and parents would listen to the podcast to enhance dual learning, while also promoting future generations to be included in their vaccine decisions. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically raised awareness of the impact of infectious disease and the vital role immunizations play in their control. Therefore, its vital everyone becomes well informed to generate accurate views on immunizations and hopefully increase their uptake.