

PERMANENT SELECT  
COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE  
CHAIRMAN

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
EX-OFFICIO MEMBER



**ADAM B. SCHIFF**

MEMBER OF CONGRESS • 28<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

2269 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

245 EAST OLIVE AVENUE, SUITE 200  
BURBANK, CA 91502

@RepAdamSchiff · schiff.house.gov

March 1, 2019

Jeffrey Bezos  
Chief Executive Officer  
Amazon  
410 Terry Avenue North  
Seattle, WA 98109

Dear Mr. Bezos:

As more Americans use the Internet and social media platforms as their primary source of information, it is important that we explore the quality of the information that they receive, particularly on issues that directly impact the health and well-being of Americans, as well as the millions who use your site around the world. Accordingly, I am writing out of my concern that Amazon is surfacing and recommending products and content that discourage parents from vaccinating their children, a direct threat to public health, and reversing progress made in tackling vaccine-preventable diseases.

The scientific and medical communities are in overwhelming consensus that vaccines are both effective and safe. There is no evidence to suggest that vaccines cause life-threatening or disabling diseases, and the dissemination of unfounded and debunked theories about the dangers of vaccinations pose a great risk to public health. In fact, the World Health Organization listed vaccine hesitancy – the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines – as one of the top threats to global health in 2019. In a dramatic demonstration of the dangers, Washington state declared a public health emergency due to a measles epidemic in Clark County, signaling the resurgence of a potentially fatal disease that was effectively eliminated from the United States decades ago by vaccines.

There is strong evidence to suggest that at least part of the source of this trend is the degree to which medically inaccurate information about vaccines surface on the websites where many Americans get their information, among them Amazon. As the largest online marketplace in the world, Amazon is in a unique position to shape consumption.

Yet the algorithms which power social media platforms and Amazon's recommendations are not designed to distinguish quality information from misinformation or misleading information and, as a result, harmful anti-vaccine messages have been able to thrive and spread. The consequences are particularly troubling for public health issues. If a concerned parent consistently sees information in their Amazon searches or recommendations that cast doubt on the safety or efficacy of vaccines, it could cause them to disregard the advice of their children's physicians

and public health experts and decline to follow the recommended vaccination schedule. Repetition of information, even if false, can often be mistaken for accuracy, and exposure to anti-vaccine content via your web service may negatively shape user attitudes towards vaccination.

Additionally, even parents and guardians who seek out accurate information about vaccines could unwittingly reach pages and videos with misinformation. A report by CNN<sup>[1]</sup> found that on Amazon, suggested searches related to vaccines often led users to publications or videos providing medically and scientifically inaccurate information, including some with misleading titles that purport to be medically accurate or neutral on the topic.

Finally, I am concerned by the report that Amazon accepts paid advertising that contains deliberate misinformation about vaccines; promoting these advertisements as suggested content ahead of intended search results. Every online platform, including Amazon, must act responsibly and ensure that they do not contribute to this growing public health catastrophe

As a Member of Congress who is deeply concerned about declining vaccination rates around the nation, I am requesting additional information on the steps that you currently take to provide medically accurate information on vaccinations to your users, and to encourage you to consider additional steps you can take to address this growing problem.

Specifically, I request that you provide answers on the following questions:

- Does content which provides medically inaccurate information about vaccines violate your terms of service?
- What actions do you currently take to address misinformation related to vaccines on your platforms? Are you considering or taking additional actions?
- Do you accept paid advertising from anti-vaccine activists and groups on your platforms? How much has been spent in the past year on advertising on this topic?
- What steps do you currently take to prevent anti-vaccine videos or information from being recommended to users, either algorithmically or as a suggested search result?

I appreciate your timely response to these questions and encourage you to consider what additional steps you can take to address this growing problem. As more Americans rely on your services as their primary source of information, it is vital that you take that responsibility with the seriousness it requires, and nowhere more so than in matters of public health and children's health. Thank you for your attention to this important topic.

Sincerely,



**Adam B. Schiff**  
Member of Congress

[1] <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/27/tech/amazon-anti-vaccine-books-movies/index.html>