



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Misinformation meets its match with new public health campaign

KCHD launches Webidemic

Knoxville, Tenn. — Online misinformation has become so widespread the World Economic Forum considers it one of the main threats to human society. Digital misinformation is a challenge not just for the world's economies but also for health and medicine. Unfounded claims about infectious diseases, such as Zika or Ebola, fad diets, supposed cure-all products, unnecessary or ineffective "treatments," and many other health myths are prolific on the internet. In an effort to help shine a light on this issue and help the public see through often sophisticated misinformation efforts, the Knox County Health Department (KCHD) is launching a new public health campaign called Webidemic.

"One of our key priorities is making sure everyone in our community has the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their health," KCHD Director Dr. Martha Buchanan said. "In the past several years especially, we've found ourselves addressing misinformation on a near daily basis, whether it's in the community, working with the media, our patients or on social media."

According to the Pew Research Center, the majority of Americans use the internet to search for health information; and 75 percent of online health seekers do not consistently check the source and date of the information they find.

KCHD's campaign includes an online guide for the public with tips, examples and resources, available at knoxcounty.org/health/webidemic. The guide has information on common red flags, bias, medical studies, finding the right experts, as well as local and free resources. Each month through 2018, KCHD will feature different themes and subject matter experts, many of whom are partners with other agencies.

"Our hope is that Webidemic will be another set of tools in the community's toolbox to help combat this issue," said KCHD Community Relations Director Katharine Killen. "Since health misinformation isn't likely to vanish from the internet, it's important for all of us to develop a healthy sense of skepticism, be aware of our own biases, know how to find quality sources, and, above all, work with health care providers to make informed decisions."

About Knox County Health Department

As the first health department in Tennessee to achieve national accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board, the Knox County Health Department (KCHD) is dedicated to ensuring the conditions in which every resident can be healthy. KCHD investigates disease outbreaks, identifies community health threats, conducts extensive outreach and education, prepares for public health emergencies, provides and connects the public with medical care, enforces food safety and air quality laws, and more. For more information, visit www.knoxcounty.org/health.

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