

Evaluation of a Canadian Social Media Platform for Communicating Perinatal Health Information During a Pandemic

Summary

This study evaluated the impact of the Instagram account @PandemicPregnancyGuide (PPG), which was created by Canadian doctors to share reliable pregnancy health information during the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers surveyed 1,818 followers and reviewed Instagram data to see why people followed PPG and how it affected their health choices. The results show that followers valued simple, expert-led summaries of scientific research, especially about COVID-19 vaccination, infection, and childbirth. Many said the account influenced their decisions, like following public health advice, getting vaccinated, and choosing to vaccinate their children.

Implications

This study shows social media run by healthcare professionals can share trustworthy health information and help people make better choices. It emphasizes the need to explain complex scientific ideas in simple terms, especially during public health emergencies. The results suggest that future health campaigns should use digital platforms to reach more people. It also points out that continued funding and support are needed to keep these efforts going.

Reference: Postill, G., Hussain-Shamsy, N., Dephore, S., et al. (2025). Evaluation of a Canadian social media platform for communicating perinatal health information during a pandemic. *PLOS Digital Health*, 4(4), e0000802.

PMID: 40193332

For more information, please contact Gemma Postill at gemma.postill@utoronto.ca or Tali Bolger at tali.bolger@unityhealth.to

What is the current situation?

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, pregnant people had many unanswered questions and struggled to get the healthcare they needed during pregnancy.
- Many pregnant and postpartum people in Canada sought health information online and on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- There was an increase in false information spread online, making it harder for people to find reliable, science-based health advice.
- People needed clear, reliable, and up-to-date medical information, especially about COVID-19 vaccines, infection risks, and childbirth.
- Public health messages had to fight widespread false information and connect with people who rely on digital platforms for news.
- A group of Canadian doctors created @PandemicPregnancyGuide, an Instagram account, that shares easy-to-understand, science-based pregnancy health information.
- By December 2022, PPG had over 43,500 followers, proving that people want trusted health advice on social media.

What did we do?

- Surveyed 1,818 past and current followers to learn why they used the account and how it shaped their health choices.
- Studied Instagram activity (likes, shares, comments) to see how people interacted with the content and how far it reached.

What were the results?

- 99% of people said PPG was a reliable, trustworthy source of health information.
- Most followers (76-88%) said the account made them more likely to take precautions, like wearing masks, get vaccinated during pregnancy, or encouraging others to get vaccinated.
- About 58% said PPG influenced their decision to vaccinate their children.
- Followers especially appreciated posts that explained scientific research in simple terms, like the #MedicalMonday posts.
- The platform helped people feel less alone and anxious, creating a supportive community during a difficult time.

Funded UofT's CREMS Summer Research Program and UHT's Department of Family Medicine Research Grant