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Wellness Through Answers News

September/October 2020

Linking Connecticut Patients, Families, and Residents to Reliable Health Information

Have a Personal Health Question?

Wellness Through Answers staff can help you find answers. Our medical librarians research personal health questions for Connecticut residents. Our service is free and confidential. Call or email us with your question: (860) 679-4055 / hnet@uchc.edu

Just the Facts Please

Misinformation and disinformation **abound on the internet**, especially on social media. With presidential elections less than two months away, getting factual information on campaign issues has never been more urgent. **Many younger Americans** get their political news from social media sites. Another age group,

older adults, may not use social media as much but are **more likely to share** misinformation posted online. Social media companies are increasingly being used by candidates to communicate with voters in part because their messages are not filtered. How can voters obtain accurate information online?

Some individuals and organizations have stepped in to help. **Elizabeth Stoycheff**, Associate Professor of Communication at Wayne State University, offers **tips to help voters** discern facts from fiction. Social psychologist **H. Colleen Sinclair** advises her students about **how to spot propaganda** on the internet and steer clear of mistruths and half-truths. Pen America, an organization supporting journalism, has advice for **talking to family and friends** who share misinformation on the internet. Finally, the International Society for Technology in Education has a top ten list of **fact-checking websites** to promote media literacy.

Travel the World - No Suitcase Required

Armchair travel has never been more popular. Despite vacation package discounts, many people are reluctant to take a plane, cruise ship, or train for fear of catching COVID-19. You don't have to miss out on your dream vacation; all you need is an internet connection. Indulge your wanderlust with the following websites:

The Hidden Worlds of National Parks - Tour Bryce Canyon in Utah, Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, the Kenai Fjords in Alaska, Hawaii Volcanoes in Hawaii, and Dry Tortugas in Florida.

Explore Fairbanks - See Alaska's Northern Lights or take a ride on a dog sled.

Sanctuaries 360 - Dive beneath the sea to swim with sea lions, sharks, turtles, and explore coral reefs and shipwrecks.

One Strange Rock - Explore what life is like as an astronaut aboard the International Space Station.

Explore the Egyptian burial sites of **Queen Meresankh III** or **Pharaoh Ramses VI**.

The China Guide - Climb the Great Wall of China.

Bringing Africa Home - Go on a safari in South Africa.

Safely Reopening Schools During the Pandemic

Safely reopening public schools comes down to these essentials: masks (most important), handwashing, social distancing, ventilation, and air filtration. According to Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health Professor Joseph Allen, only minimal physical changes to buildings (no matter how old) are needed to make them safe for indoor classes. Parents and school administrators can find standards and guidelines for how to make school buildings healthy on [Schoolsforhealth.org](https://www.schoolsforhealth.org).

Stem Cell Therapies - Separating the Good from the Bad

Stem cells have the unique ability to develop into specialized cells in the body. Research is underway to see whether stem cells can replace cells that are damaged or lost due to a disease. Stem cell clinics have popped up all across the United States offering cures for a range of serious conditions. Although there are legitimate trials using stem cells, some clinics have used the federal government's ClinicalTrials.gov (a database of clinical trials) to market themselves. The Food and Drug Administration does not [have the resources](#) to regulate this industry leaving consumers on their own to determine whether the cures touted in testimonials on clinic websites are true.

Fortunately, there are some individuals and organizations who are trying to help consumers get accurate information:

- [Paul Knoepfler](#), a stem cell researcher at the University of California Davis School of Medicine writes a blog called "[The Niche](#)", which educates consumers about stem cell therapy and guides them to [legitimate clinical trials](#).
- The Mayo Clinic [Regenerative Medicine Consult Service](#) educates patients and physicians about regenerative therapies and stem cell clinical trials relevant to their condition.
- [California Institute for Regenerative Medicine](#) funds stem cell research for patients with "unmet medical needs." Their website links patients to clinical trials by health conditions, provides patient testimonials, and offers advice on how to distinguish between legitimate therapies and scams.
- [International Society for Stem Cell Research](#) educates professionals and the public about stem cells and research into medical treatments. The website provides a reality check by emphasizing what is still unknown about stem cells' therapeutic potential. It also includes [Nine Things to Know](#), important topics for all patients to discuss with their physicians.

- UConn Health neurologist Dr. [Jaimie Imotolla](#) has a patient handout about the dangers of stem cell therapies in multiple languages.

The Basics of COVID-19 Testing

There are two types of tests for the virus that causes COVID-19: diagnostic tests and [antibody](#) tests. How are they different, and what do their results mean?

Diagnostic tests show whether a person has an **active** COVID-19 infection and should be isolated. There are two types of diagnostic tests: molecular tests and [antigen](#) tests.

Most molecular tests look for viral genetic material in a swab sample of nasal or throat mucus. They are highly accurate but may take a week or longer for results. A just-approved "[rapid saliva](#)" molecular test, however, yields similar results in less time than mucus-based tests.

Antigen-based tests look for viral surface proteins. They are faster than molecular tests (results may be available in 15 minutes,) but they are not as accurate. If someone has COVID symptoms but tests negative, a follow-up molecular test may be necessary.

Antibody tests show whether someone **has ever been infected** with the COVID-19 virus, **not** whether they currently have the virus. Why? The body takes several days to weeks to produce enough antibodies to be detected by the test. Antibody tests use blood samples, and results may take up to three days.

Have you been exposed to someone with COVID-19? Use the FDA's [COVID testing locator](#) to find a testing site near you.

Topical Dental Treatment Stops Tooth Decay

Silver diamine fluoride (STF) is a prescription medication [approved by the Food and Drug Administration](#) to reduce tooth sensitivity. [Recent research](#) has shown that topical application of STF is also highly effective at stopping active tooth decay. STF is fast, low-cost, and pain-free, and is rapidly becoming the [treatment of choice](#) for cavities in children and older, non-mobile adults who are unable to get to a dentist. During the current pandemic, dental hygienists

who visit nursing homes and home-bound adults are finding the treatment to be life-changing.

No Need to Cancel Halloween

A Halloween without costumes and candy would be frightful! There's no need to cancel this popular holiday, say health experts. [Harvard Global Health Institute](#) and the [Halloween and Costume Association](#) created a website, [Halloween 2020](#), with pandemic-appropriate ideas for celebrating Halloween. The website features an interactive map of the United States that places states in different color zones based on their current number of COVID-19 cases. Select your state's color zone for lots of ideas to keep Halloween spooky and safe.

Need more inspiration? *Kaiser Health News* surveyed pediatricians and parents from across the US for [safe alternatives](#) to door-to-door trick or treating.

More News You Can Use

[Healthiest US communities](#) also have the lowest rates of COVID-19

[Decibel](#) - a new app that lets you measure noise like a pro

The low down on [air purifiers](#) and how to make your own

[COVID Bootcamp](#) helps COVID-19 long-haulers recover

COVID-19 [wearable apps](#) - do they benefit patients?

[Safety](#) of COVID-19 vaccines

[Immunity](#) explained

[Fall asleep](#) in under two minutes

Calculate your risk of falling - in [English](#), in [Spanish](#)

Turn your smartphone into a [white noise machine](#)

Tips for [siblings who share](#) caregiving

Get paid to be a [family caregiver](#)

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UConn Health Nondiscrimination Policy