

# Be careful, says Health Canada. Donald Trump isn't the only one promoting COVID-19 'cures'

*Tonda MacCharles*

OTTAWA—The dicey claims are not just from a U.S. president musing about bleach injections as a possible cure for the [coronavirus](#).

There are dozens and dozens of peddlers of all kinds of snake oil in our midst.

Health Canada has published a list of 101 products for which dubious or possibly dangerous claims have been made.

Everything from echinacea and oregano oil, vitamins and other so-called natural remedies to “boost the immune system “during the threat of COVID-19,” to “ozone lamp bulbs” to ultraviolet disinfecting lamps, washable reusable dust masks, bottle sprayers and power washers billed as “COVID-19 virus prevention” able to “dispense alcohol for disinfection COVID-19 Virus Prevention.”

There were residential air purifiers listed on Kijiji with the claim “Save yourself and family from coronavirus!”

Face shields. Laboratory safety glasses sold as “adjustable for home office COVID-19 virus protection.”

Carbon water filter systems: “Since the coronavirus, we have to protect ourselves from drinking water and air we breathe and drink.”

Sometimes the fraudulent claims are not made by the actual product manufacturers or distributors, but by second-hand vendors or resellers pitching them on Amazon, Facebook or Kijiji.

Selling or advertising health products that make false or misleading claims is illegal, and Health Canada makes clear: there is no cure, or treatment, for COVID-19.

Tim Caulfield, who holds the Canada Research Chair in health law and policy and teaches at the University of Alberta's law faculty and school of public health, said he is encouraged by the pushback now against “COVID-19 claptrap.”

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But he says regulators won't be able to catch all the bad actors, especially those which use “wiggly phrases” in their marketing.

In an article on the scourge of fakes and pseudo-science in Nature magazine [published](#) Monday, Caulfield said he hopes “one of the legacies of this crisis will be the recognition that tolerating pseudo-science can cause real harm.”

Caulfield said in an interview with the Star that scientists, universities and health-care institutions have to speak out, and “stop tolerating and legitimizing health pseudo-science” not just by their silence but by allowing unproven therapies within their own settings.

Caulfield, who wrote the book “*Is Gwyneth Paltrow Wrong About Everything*,” said if respected institutions, such as the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, offer “a science-free practice” like reiki treatments, it’s no wonder people are fooled.

“A similar argument can be made about public-health providers in Canada and the United Kingdom: by offering homeopathy, they *de facto* encourage the idea that this scientifically implausible remedy can work against COVID-19.”

Health Canada’s [website](#) says it has “resolved” 50 advertising incidents of “non-compliant marketing” as of April 16, there are another 51 “ongoing” cases.

The department could not answer Monday how exactly it has acted, whether any charges were laid, whether warnings were sufficient to dissuade the vendors from making the false claims. Nor would it say which are the worst offenders among those that are still “ongoing.”

In some cases, websites like Kijiji now first link any COVID-19 searches to public health websites where people can get accurate information.

Tonda MacCharles is an Ottawa-based reporter covering federal politics for the Star. Follow her on Twitter: [@tondamacc](#)

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