

Twitter pulls down two coronavirus tweets from Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro

The tweets reportedly included videos showing Bolsonaro questioning social distancing.

Twitter removed two tweets by Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro that reportedly included videos of the politician questioning social distancing and quarantine measures aimed at slowing the spread of the novel coronavirus, a sign that the company is taking a tougher stance against health misinformation.



Twitter will leave up some tweets from politicians that violate its rules because of public interest, but says it will likely draw the line when a tweet can lead to physical harm or violence. Earlier this month, the social network expanded its definition of harm and required users to take down tweets that included a denial of global or local health authority recommendations to decrease a person's likelihood of exposure to COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the coronavirus. The move comes as social networks face criticism that they aren't doing enough to slow the spread of health misinformation.

A Twitter spokesman confirmed it pulled down the Brazilian president's tweets for spreading coronavirus misinformation. "Twitter recently announced the expansion of its rules to cover content that could be against public health information provided by official sources and could put people at greater risk of transmitting COVID-19," a Twitter spokesman said in a statement.

CNET could not view the videos in the tweets after they were removed on Sunday, but BuzzFeed News reported that the Brazilian politician also commended the use of anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine for treating the virus. Clinical trials are still needed to prove whether the drug is effective, but there have been anecdotal reports

that it could have some benefit, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services.



"What I have been hearing from people is that they want to work," Bolsonaro said in one of the deleted videos, according to BuzzFeed. "Brazil cannot stop or we'll turn into Venezuela," he added.

Notices that say the tweets are no longer available because they violate Twitter's rules appear on Bolsonaro's Twitter account.

BuzzFeed reported that the videos were on Facebook but were later removed. A Facebook spokeswoman said it removed the videos for making the false claim that chloroquine is an effective treatment everywhere. "We remove content on Facebook and Instagram that violates our community standards, which do not allow misinformation that could lead to physical harm," she said.

Bolsonaro couldn't be immediately reached and the Brazilian embassy didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Bolsonaro isn't the only politician that Twitter has cracked down on for spreading coronavirus misinformation. Last week, the company deleted a tweet by Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro for recommending the use of a "natural brew" as a potential cure for the coronavirus.

On Friday, Twitter removed a tweet from Rudy Giuliani, President Donald Trump's personal attorney, for spreading misinformation about the coronavirus, and temporarily locked the lawyer's account. In the tweet, Giuliani quoted conservative activist Charlie Kirk, who falsely claimed that "hydroxychloroquine has been shown to have a 100% effective rate treating COVID-19." Giuliani didn't respond to a request for comment.

Still, Twitter hasn't taken action against all coronavirus misinformation posted by prominent figures. Tesla CEO and co-founder Elon Musk tweeted last week that "kids are essentially immune" from COVID-19. Even though

kids can catch the virus, Twitter left up Musk's tweet and said it was because Musk's tweet wasn't "definitive" Axios reported.

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