

The COVID-19 vaccine does not cause infertility, as social media myths are claiming

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Anti-vaccine activists have been having a field day with the myth that COVID-19 immunizations cause infertility.

There is zero evidence to support this canard, but it has caught on because it has the thinnest veneer of scientific plausibility, plus a coincidental echo in a science fiction miniseries.

The co-originator of the myth is Wolfgang Wodarg, a German politician and physician who left medical practice in 1994. He was "the prime mover" in 2010 behind cries that the [swine flu](#) pandemic was fake and that [drug companies](#) had used the crisis to squander money on "inefficient [vaccine](#) strategies" that exposed people to "insufficiently tested vaccines," as an article in the journal *Nature* reported.

In December, Wodarg and a former Pfizer employee petitioned the European Medicines Agency—Europe's version of the U.S. Food and

Drug Administration—to delay approval of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer-BioNTech. They speculated that because the vaccine triggers disease-fighting antibodies to the [coronavirus spike protein](#), it might trigger an [immune response](#) against a protein called syncytin-1, which is involved in the formation of the human placenta. No placenta means no pregnancy, which means infertility.

The spike protein and syncytin-1 have a tiny bit of genetic code that is the same, but even Wodarg's petition says "there is no indication whether antibodies against spike proteins of [coronaviruses] would also act like anti-syncytin-1 antibodies."

The idea that the vaccine would do that is wrong for several reasons.

As Jill Foster, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at the University of Minnesota, told WebMD, the spike protein and the placental protein are about as similar as two different 10-digit phone numbers, each containing a 7.

Besides, if the vaccine could trigger an immune response against the placental protein, so could an actual COVID-19 infection. That, in turn, would mean millions of women of childbearing age around the world who suffered COVID-19 over the past year are suddenly unable to have children.

"There's no evidence that this pandemic has changed fertility patterns," Paul Offit, a Children's Hospital of Philadelphia pediatrician and vaccine expert who advises the FDA, told WebMD.

That didn't stop anti-vaccine groups from posting disinformation on social media. "Head of Pfizer Research: COVID vaccine is female sterilization," declares a post flagged by Facebook as false.

The FDA has cleared both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for use in women of childbearing age. Although pregnant women were not included in the vaccine trials, a few dozen women who participated in the trials became pregnant. They continued in the trials with no safety problems.

The pandemic vaccination-causes-infertility notion was a plot device in *Utopia*, an Amazon Prime miniseries that was canceled after its first season.

"Near the end of the show's first season, released in late September, the biotech chief executive Dr. Kevin Christie (John Cusack), who created the bogus vaccine and is also a secret human trafficker, finally reveals his master plan: His vaccine is designed to make people infertile in order to radically reduce the world's population," says a New York Times review. "In Christie's view, humans are the real virus, wiping out other creatures, and he's convincing enough to make one of the show's crusading characters join his mad cult."

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