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BBC Trending

# The rise of India's 'Covid quack'

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## BBC Trending

In-depth reporting on social media

**A charismatic anti-vaccination campaigner has gained popularity by**

**claiming that medical science's approach to the pandemic is entirely wrong. But critics say Biswaroop Roy Chowdhury is endangering lives by falsely claiming he can cure Covid-19 through diet alone, report Ed Main and Reha Kansara.**

Biswaroop Roy Chowdhury is not one to hold back.

"According to me, most deaths are not because of coronavirus itself but because of its treatment," he says in one video on his website.

The Indian social media star - or former social media star, now that he's banned on several platforms - asserts that conventional medicine is a conspiracy designed to line the pockets of doctors and big business.



The queue outside a coronavirus vaccination centre in Mumbai

"Drugs do not help in curing any illness," he told the BBC. "I strongly believe that humans do not need vaccines at all."

In his videos, he claims his diet plans, rich in fruits and vegetables, will cure not only Covid-19, but diabetes and Aids.

Medical science says all of this is nonsense. But Mr Chowdhury has used the pandemic to spread his messages.

He teaches his followers that hospitals increase their chances of dying and says that Covid patients with breathing difficulties would do better sitting in front of a handheld fan than receiving oxygen.

To his many critics, he is a dangerous fraud whose bad advice can only further fuel India's horrific second wave of coronavirus.



REUTERS

India is suffering the highest number of new coronavirus cases in the world

"Biswaroop Roy Chowdhury is a quack," says Dr Sumaiya Shaikh, science editor of the Indian fact-checking website Alt News. "He has a huge following and that makes him even more dangerous."

It's a following that has been cultivated through numerous books, online videos and courses and packed-out live events.

- [India Covid crisis: Hospitals buckle under record surge](#)
- [What is the India Covid variant and will vaccines work?](#)
- [Covid: India on UK travel red list as Covid crisis grows](#)

YouTube, Twitter and Facebook banned Mr Chowdhury last year, but not before he assembled an army of followers - nearly one million on YouTube alone before his account was deleted.

He still has official channels on WhatsApp and Telegram. Biswaroop's fans are also uploading and spreading his content on proxy accounts.

WhatsApp told us they are working hard to limit the spread of false coronavirus information on their platform. Telegram didn't respond to a request for comment.

## A gift for publicity

Mr Chowdhury presents himself as a plucky underdog figure pitted against a medical establishment intent on deceiving the public.

Covid-19 is "just like normal flu" he asserts - despite the fact it's actually significantly deadlier. And despite the **overwhelming evidence** to the contrary, he claims that face masks don't help stop the spread of virus and will actually

make wearers ill.

He has co-opted the Urdu word azaadi, meaning "freedom" - a rallying cry that resonates with many oppressed communities in India, for his slogan "masks se azaadi" ("freedom from masks").



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Mr Chowdhury falsely claims face masks poison wearers

In one of his several coronavirus e-books, Mr Chowdhury offers 100,000 rupees (about £960; \$1,300) to anyone who "can prove that vaccines have ever helped anyone in any way".

There is, of course, a vast literature of medical research stretching back decades that documents how vaccines have helped control and even eradicate diseases all over the world. But Mr Chowdhury discounts it entirely.

## Diet cure claims

Mr Chowdhury started developing his controversial diet "cures" about a decade ago.

It's just one strand of a colourful and varied career. After training as an engineer, he dabbled in Bollywood film-making and even cast himself as the star in one movie.

He is also the chief editor and founder of both the India and Asia Book of Records which is modelled on, but not affiliated with, the Guinness Book of Records.

Nilesh Christopher, a journalist with the tech website Rest of World, says Mr Chowdhury became interested in nutrition when his wife couldn't shake a flu-like illness.

"What he told me was, he was running around from pillar to post, visiting doctors, and trying to figure out a cure for it, but he couldn't," he says. "That is when he goes into this mode of self-learning and he claims to have read research papers and figured out this magic formula which is coconut water, citrus fruits and vegetables."