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## Covid-19: Tory MP is suspended after comparing vaccines to holocaust

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A Conservative MP has been suspended from the party for spreading misinformation after he compared covid-19 vaccination to the holocaust.

Andrew Bridgen, MP for North West Leicestershire, who has made a number of disputed claims about the safety and efficacy of the vaccines in recent months, including in the House of Commons,<sup>1</sup> has had the whip removed by his party over his latest comments on social media.

In a now deleted tweet linking to an article that questioned the safety of the vaccines, Bridgen had said, “As one consultant cardiologist said to me, this is the biggest crime against humanity since the holocaust.”

The Conservative chief whip, Simon Hart, said, “Andrew Bridgen has crossed a line, causing great offence in the process. Misinformation about the vaccine causes harm and costs lives. I am therefore removing the whip from Andrew Bridgen with immediate effect, pending a formal investigation.

The prime minister, Rishi Sunak, also condemned Bridgen’s remarks, describing them as “utterly unacceptable.” The loss of the party whip means that Bridgen will sit as an independent MP while the formal investigation into his conduct is carried out.

Commenting on Bridgen’s suspension, Kent Woods, emeritus professor of therapeutics at the University of Leicester, said that there was “overwhelming evidence” from trials and epidemiological data that “the benefits of covid vaccines for the population as a whole far outweigh potential harms.”

He added, “Freedom of speech, particularly on such a public platform as the House of Commons, carries a responsibility not to mislead the public by alarmist statements which misrepresent the scientific evidence. The MMR-autism fiasco demonstrated clearly that groundless assertions of vaccine hazards can cause real harm. I am pleased to see that his party is taking action.”

### “Misleading comments” on journal article

Bridgen has also been censured by BMJ after making misleading comments relating to an opinion article published by the *Journal of Medical Ethics*,<sup>2</sup> one of BMJ’s specialist journals, about covid-19 vaccines.

The MP tweeted in December, “BMJ’s *Journal of Medical Ethics* confirm vaccine causes more harm than benefit to younger people,” and he called for the vaccine rollout to be suspended in children.

In a statement BMJ said that Bridgen’s comment was “misleading for several reasons,” highlighting that “conclusions reached in its content belong to the authors, not the journal itself.”

BMJ’s statement said, “The article develops an argument about the ethics of mandatory Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna covid-19 vaccine booster doses in some American universities. It does not claim that covid-19 vaccines are unsafe, only that based on the available evidence, the risk-benefit ratio doesn’t justify mandating booster shots in college students, in the authors’ opinion.

“[The *Journal of Medical Ethics*] has already published a rapid response to this article which claims that other benefits need to be considered. And we anticipate that further responses to this article will be published.

“Many new vaccines are in development and new variants are likely to emerge, so the ethics of mandatory boosters for college students remain a legitimate area of interest for clinicians and policy makers alike.”

1 Bridgen A. Vaccines: potential harms—Commons debate. 13 Dec 2022. <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2022-12-13c.1086.0&s=Andrew+Bridgen#g1091.0>

2 Bardosh K, Krug A, Jamrozik E, et al. Covid-19 vaccine boosters for young adults: a risk benefit assessment and ethical analysis of mandate policies at universities. *J Med Ethics* 2022 (published online 5 Dec). doi: 10.1136/jme-2022-108449

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