

South Africa Covid-19 & vaccines Social Listening Report 12 June 2023, Report 86

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This is the weekly RCCE Social Listening and Infodemic Management trends report on COVID-19 vaccine and other health emergencies tracking and responding to public concerns, sentiments, rumours, and misinformation in South Africa. It provides key trends and analysis of online and offline content. Thanks to all contributors to this weekly report.

### KEY TRENDS | COVID-19

**Vaccine hesitancy.** Although it is well known that false information about COVID-19 vaccines causes vaccine hesitancy, the most recent findings that assess the extent of the harm reveal that *“at least one of eight different false statements about COVID-19 is believed to be true or is unsure if it is true or false”* with a focus on the attitudes and beliefs that influence patient behaviour in order to create messages that support positive health outcomes during public health emergencies. ([Here](#))

**Children and COVID-19.** In this week’s news, children were reported to have infected more people in their household with COVID-19, because schools pose a risk. *“70% of household transmissions were found to have started with a child”* ([Here](#)) and *“concern of teachers for their health is justified because 24% of teachers are at risk for severe COVID-19”*. ([Here](#))

### KEY TRENDS | CHOLERA

**More concerns about cholera.** Users of social media responded negatively to social media messages aimed at curbing the spread of cholera which included; “we

are waiting for the elections to make our feelings known”, “We have no access to tap water“, “how do you expect us to boil water when there’s loadshedding?” ([Here](#))

**Reaction to visits to cholera affected communities.** Social media users who doubted do not trust government mocked the President’s visit to cholera affected Hammanskraal communities on 8 June 2023, saying; “*the visit will not make a difference*”, “*He will be giving more empty promises again*”, “*talk, talk and more talk*” and that “*he’s late? People have already died.*”

## KEY TRENDS | FLU

**Demand for flu vaccines.** There are ongoing claims of high demand of flu vaccine among now that the flu season and COVID-19 are overlapping, with high risk of developing flu-related complications. Most of these beliefs are held by pro-vaccine social media users who have encouraged others to get vaccinated. Others said “*the flu vaccine won’t protect you against COVID-19, but will protect you against flu.*” ([Here](#)) People with comorbidities have been warned to be extra careful and extra cautious. ([Here](#))

**H1N1 influenza cases detected.** Although there have been fewer influenza cases this year than in previous years ([Here](#)), there are claims that H1N1 influenza is currently dominating in cases detected. ([Here](#)) Some people, however, have rejected the flu vaccine, claiming that it is useless because it “is not working for us,” “making us sick,” ([Here](#)) or “ineffective when one already has a cold” (Here) (and here). “I must feel good enough to have the flu shot, a bit difficult when the sickness won’t go away.” ([Here](#))

**Cholera causes panic.** As panic broke following the news about the contaminated tanker with high levels of bacteria in Hammanskraal, ([Here](#)) a video showing some people fetching water from rivers. ([Here](#)) and ([Here](#)) The social media users were critical of the government. “*This government though...*”, and believed that “*This government does not know how to control and cure this disease...*” ([Here](#))

## MISINFORMATION

**MISINFO:** ~~People who have been vaccinated are more likely to get seriously ill from COVID.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim. People who have been vaccinated far less likely to experience severe symptoms. See [here](#) and [here](#).

**MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines are harmful to people who are immunocompromised.~~ **TRUTH** COVID-19 vaccine is made available to provide ongoing protection, especially for older persons and those who are immunocompromised and are at the highest risk of severe COVID complications. (Here)

**MISINFO:** ~~Adults can’t get measles.~~ **TRUTH** You can get measles at any age. However, the virus is known to be more severe in those under the age of 5 and those over 30. If you have been vaccinated for measles, you are immune to the virus. (Here)

**MISINFO:** ~~The measles vaccine can kill you.~~ The vaccine is very safe and is effective at preventing measles. **TRUTH** There have not been any recorded deaths directly caused by the measles vaccine. Some of the common side effects of the vaccine would include fevers, mild rashes, and temporary pain in the joints. Very rarely, a person may have a serious allergic reaction to the vaccine. Nonetheless, being vaccinated is much safer than getting measles. (*Here*)

## **WHO Africa Infodemic Response Alliance (AIRA) & Viral Facts**

AIRA is the Africa-wide initiative of the World Health Organisation, managing the infodemic of misinformation and communications overload related to Covid and vaccination. They produce Viral Facts content responding to misinformation which can be used freely. You can find previous reports on the [AIRA page](#).

### **Content to consider:**

In South African news this week, articles featured widespread confusion and frustration with the vaccine registration process. This week's South Africa Social Listening Report also noted considerable confusion surrounding the vaccine registration process.

- Seniors struggle with registration [Here](#), [Here](#) and [Here](#)
- Confusion with walk-ins being welcome in some areas [Here](#) and [Here](#) while others claim having been denied walk-in access & having struggled to find vaccine locations [Here](#) (also noted in South Africa Social Listening Report)
- Claim that some people trying to cheat the vaccine registration system [Here](#) and [Here](#)
- Criticism around lack of coordination on vaccine enrollment and delivery [Here](#)
- Frustrated post on lack of priority for South Africans with co-morbidities [Here](#)
- Ongoing frustration with the slowness of the vaccine rollout [here](#)

## **PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- Growing mistrust of government can potentially affect the health messages in terms of its credibility. More effort is required to build trust.
- Building the capacity of health workers as the trusted sources could also help to address misinformation among their patients.

## **METHODOLOGY AND COLLABORATION**

The Social Listening & Infodemiology team that produces this report is part of the Risk Communications & Community Engagement (RCCE) Working Group of the Department of Health in South Africa. This report is compiled following the methodology of the WHO Africa Infodemic Response Alliance (AIRA, see [here](#), the "Identify" stage. We pool information from the following:

National Health Hotline: 0800 029 999

[WhatsApp: 0600-123456](#) | [Healthhotline@health.gov.za](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)

<https://medsafety.sahpra.org.za/>

[AEFI@health.gov.za](mailto:AEFI@health.gov.za)

<https://findmyjab.co.za/>

[https://www.real411.org/Report Misinfo](https://www.real411.org/Report%20Misinfo)

WHO/AIRA [ViralFacts](#)

- **SA National Department of Health**
- **National Health Hotline:** Reports from the national callcentre
- **Org:** NDOH Covid-19 WhatsApp system
- **WHO** Africa Infodemic Response Alliance (AIRA)
- **UNICEF:** digital analysis of content on Google, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, and digital news
- **SA Red Cross:** Network of over 2,000 community volunteers reporting misinformation and concerns.
- **Real 411** Media Monitoring Africa: a mis- and disinformation reporting and debunking initiative
- **COVID Comms:** a network of communications specialists that produces information on the pandemic.
- **DOH Free State & KZN:** Provincial Departments of Health
- **Health Systems Trust, Community Constituency Front (CCF), HealthEnabled**
- **Centre for Communication Impact, Centre for Analytics & Behavioural Change, Section 27**
- **Medical Research Council, National Institute for Communicable Diseases,**
- **SA Vaccination and Immunisation Centre, HSRC, DG Murray Trust, Right to Care**
- **Universities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Free State, Wits, Stellenbosch, Sefako Makgatho**

Other organisations involved Government Communications & Information Service, SA Council of Churches, Clinton Health Access Initiative, Heartlines, Children's Radio Foundation, IPSOS, People's Health Movement, and Business for SA, SA Minerals Council, Wits Reproductive Health & HIV Institute, UN Verified, Deaf SA, SA National Council for the Blind, Treatment Action Campaign and Disability SA.

*The drafting team this week includes Charity Bhengu (NDOH). The data for this report was collected by the National Department of Health (NDOH) and Health Systems Trust (HST).*

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