

South Africa Covid-19 & Vaccine Social Listening Report

06 June 2022, Report 52

This is a weekly report of Covid-19 and vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Further information that provides the background to this report, especially input from many health districts

KEY TRENDS

News about over 50% of adults vaccinated still trending. The news that over 50% of adults in South Africa have been vaccinated remains one of the most popular Facebook posts by engagement levels, followed by SAPHRA ending its special dispensation for the use of Ivermectin, which also received high levels of engagement. ([Here](#)) Engagements with vaccine-related Twitter posts are up 55% and continuing the upward trend. The top five stories also included “white and young South Africans are the most hesitant to vaccinate” ([Here](#)), “Burn them - Here’s what happens to expired COVID vaccine” ([Here](#)), and “Long Covid is widespread, but vaccines offer some protection, studies show”. ([Here](#))

The Covid-19 and vaccine-related call volumes were the lowest. In addition to the usual questions regarding vaccination certificates and isolation on the national Covid call centre, two cases were reported as urgent, including the vaccination of an 11-year-old member of the National Baseball U12 team for the tournament in Taipei, as well as the cases of three individuals with their ID numbers registered incorrectly. This prevented the correct ID holders from registering and getting vaccinated. All of these cases were reported to the EVDS support team for resolution.

Is the fifth wave gone? As evidenced by the slow downward curve of the infection rates in the country ([Here](#)), it is believed that South Africa may be exiting the fifth wave of the virus that was driven by the BA 4 and BA 5 sub-variants of Omicron ([Here](#)). In a survey by the University of Stellenbosch, 87% of South Africans had previously been infected with the virus ([Here](#)). The government is closely monitoring the disease severity as there is still “a small increase in hospitalization driven by BA.4/BA.5. “The best way to protect yourself from coronavirus is still to get vaccinated.” ([Here](#))

Disinterest in vaccination. Most people who are disinterested to vaccinate said putting food on the table and getting jobs were more important than going to vaccinate ([Here](#)), and others were confused why there was still a need to vaccinate when “97% of the population already has immunity” ([Here](#)), “Covid-19 symptoms are mild” ([Here](#)) and others are more concerned about the state of the hospitals and clinics ([Here](#)).

Encouraging community feedback on vaccination. There was significant discussion regarding myths, and vaccination issues related to sexual and reproductive health, including concerns about “getting sick”, “expired vaccines”, “trust”, “erectile dysfunction”, “affecting menstrual cycle,” as well as others believing “Covid is over.” While the feedback from Covid communication workshops, attended by more than 2,000 people, is not yet generalizable to all communities, more people reported that they were vaccinated after attending the workshops. 44% of those surveyed reported they were vaccinated after the workshop, 31% were still unvaccinated after the workshop, and 25% had already been vaccinated. The statistics are still preliminary and do not represent the total number of attendees.

Ongoing disbelief about monkeypox. The news coverage of the monkeypox outbreak in Europe and America has caused an online spectacle with many claiming the outbreak was yet another tool used by governments to control people and violate human rights. Others were curious to know “why is monkeypox spreading internationally?’ The virus was certainly not as deadly as the outbreak in 1958 which occurred in colonies of monkeys, according to the experts. ([Here](#)) “It can be contained with vaccines that are already stockpiled and available in some countries. ([Here](#))

Reporting on monkeypox declining. With no case reported in South Africa, there is less public and media interest in the topic. An old rumour about “US spreading monkeypox in endemic African countries through the US-controlled laboratories in Nigeria” re-surfaced ([Here](#)). The US dismissed the speculation as “pure

fabrication". [\(Here\)](#). Currently, five African endemic countries are infected with DR Congo being the most affected with over 1,000 cases and 58 deaths since the beginning of the year. [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)

Growing distrust of all vaccines. More people are questioning why all disease outbreaks should be contained by vaccines. *"If I knew what I know now I would never have allowed my child to get any form of a vaccine,"* and also blamed childhood vaccines without any evidence for *"his depression with aggressive mood swings."* This backlash was not only directed at Covid-19 vaccines but all vaccines, and affects global public health programmes negatively, according to an expert.

Acute hepatitis of unknown origins: The World Health Organisation announced this week that "it is investigating the 650 probable cases of acute hepatitis from children which have been reported from 33 countries between April 5 and May 26", and that "the cause of the acute hepatitis cases is not known". [\(Here\)](#) Further reports were that at least 38 children required transplants, and nine deaths were reported to WHO. The countries affected included US, UK, Canada, Demark, France, Spain, and other countries. There was no clear indication if Africa was also affected.[\(Here\)](#)

Mixed reactions about Ivermectin. The South African Health Products Regulatory Authority this week announced that the controlled Compassionate Use Access Programme was to be terminated because "there is no credible evidence that it helps treat COVID-19".[\(Here\)](#) In reaction to this, some people welcomed the decision [\(Here\)](#), but others were disappointed. "the government was attempting to force vaccinations at all costs [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)."

DISTRICT REPORTS

This information comes from District Communicators working in districts around the country.

ILembe District: Many people still do not understand why they need booster shots after being told they are "fully vaccinated". By combining child protection week activities with Covid-19 awareness the district communicators were able to share relevant information.

Namakwa District. Consent forms were not returned to schools due to parents and guardians' reluctance to have their children vaccinated. The district communicators have requested more communication material, especially in Afrikaans to explain and promote the importance of vaccines, especially after a rumour that "monkeypox is the new deadlier Covid-19".

City of Johannesburg. There is a growing acceptance of vaccines among the youth due to the school zone making it easy to access vaccines. Nevertheless, some learners "feel conflicted about vaccines" because of side effects and feel obliged "to take the vaccine because they fear hospitalization". The integration of sports and vaccine support was successful in improving vaccine uptake.

Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati. Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati. Young people have different views about vaccination obtained from the internet, which include that "vaccination will turn them into zombies", "vaccines will kill them", and "vaccines are for older people". In addition, the district communicators also highlighted their challenges to conduct social mobilisation, including "lack of transport" and "not getting the material to the vaccination sites".

MISINFORMATION

MISINFO: Ivermectin is an effective treatment for Covid19. **TRUTH:** There is currently no credible evidence to support the use of Ivermectin in treating COVID-1. See [here](#) and [here](#),

MISINFO: Monkey pox is the new Covid and is a scam to control or kill us. **TRUTH:** Monkey Pox is not new, but it has changed to allow it to spread further it is a different disease and different virus to COVID. See [here](#) and [here](#)

MISINFO: The Post Office said they will no longer pay the grants shows the government is lying about its commitment to pay the grant. **TRUTH:** The Post Office will no longer pay the R350 social relief of distress grant, but people can now get it paid at any Pick n Pay, Boxer, Shoprite, Checkers or USave. See [here](#).

MISINFO: Vaccines side effects are being under reported and can kill you. SA Adverse reactions site shows how many have died! **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim, most side effects are mild and self-

resolving. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). SA has excellent adverse reporting mechanisms backed by evidence see [here](#) for a credible local site on adverse reactions.

MISINFO: Covid isn't that bad, so we don't need to be vaccinated. **TRUTH:** While some people who get COVID can show no symptoms, vaccines are highly effective in preventing serious illness and hospitalisation. See [here](#) and [here](#)

MISINFO: Only older people need to get vaccinated as they face a biggest risk of death. **TRUTH:** While older people do have a higher risk it's important for young healthy people to also be vaccinated, to help reach herd immunity and also limit variants. See [here](#) and [here](#)

MISINFO: Natural immunity is better than vaccine immunity and shows we don't need to be vaccinated. **TRUTH:** Natural immunity can help protect you, but it depends on when you had COVID, which variant and your own immunity strength and health. Vaccines are essential to giving sufficient anti-bodies to protect you, which is why boosters are essential too. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Vaccines cause infertility and erectile dysfunction. **TRUTH:** No evidence to support these claims. COVID however can impair sexual performance. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Covid booster vaccines are dangerous **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim. Boosters shots normal practice. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Foreigners will be deported if they try and get vaccinated. **TRUTH:** While vulnerable people especially may be fearful anyone in SA can be vaccinated, regardless of nationality. See [here](#) and [here](#)

MISINFO: Foreigners are now being targeted for vaccination as means of controlling and killing them. **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim. Vaccines are safe and effective regardless of nationality. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Vaccines are dangerous and are now linked to "vaccine-acquired immunodeficiency syndrome" or "VAIDS". **TRUTH:** No evidence at all to support the claim of immunodeficiency being related to COVID-19 vaccines. See [here](#) and [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 the Viral Facts content responding to misinformation which can be used freely. Here are the latest [Viral Facts Africa](#) resources (please use them):

PFIZER COVID VACCINE CANCER RISK

Twitter EN: <https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1523968445888536577>

Facebook EN: <https://www.facebook.com/viralfacts/videos/1582215815495358>

MALARIA VACCINE DEVELOPMENT

Twitter EN: <https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1522539024019243014>

Facebook EN: <https://www.facebook.com/viralfacts/videos/747137133121498>

FLU & COVID VACCINES

Twitter EN: <https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1518850013878751233>

Facebook EN: <https://www.facebook.com/viralfacts/videos/373416241391911>

ROUTINE CHILDHOOD VACCINES

Twitter EN: <https://twitter.com/WHOAFRO/status/1519651667771367426>

Facebook EN: <https://www.facebook.com/viralfacts/videos/973556790025205>

Content from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI): [here](#).

Viral Facts Africa campaign to counter vaccine hesitancy: [Link](#) / ([EN](#))

Viral Facts Africa new campaign to support Covid-19 vaccine demand across Africa. [Link](#)

PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- District communicators have highlighted that most of the information material produced for the districts does not reach some of the vaccination sites. The team will assess the extent of the problem.
- The social media narrative that the government is trying to control people through vaccines has resurfaced despite the many efforts to debunk this false claim. We will continue to reinforce facts on vaccines.
- To continue sharing general information regarding all vaccines at the primary healthcare level and ensure visibility of the posters within public spaces as part of an ongoing effort to integrate health services.

METHODOLOGY AND COLLABORATION

The Social Listening & Infodemiology team that produces this report is part of the Risk Communications & Community Engagement Working Group of the Department of Health. 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:

- **SA National Department of Health**
- **Covid-19 contact centre:** Reports from the national call centre
- **Praekelt.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
- **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
- **Community Constituency Front (CCF), Covid-19 Hotline, Health Systems Trust**
- **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 RESOURCES

SA Corona virus website [Here](#)
Real 411 to report misinfo [Here](#)

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, HealthEnabled, Deaf SA, SA National Council for the Blind, Treatment Action Campaign and Disability SA.

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