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## South Africa Covid-19 & Vaccine Social Listening Report

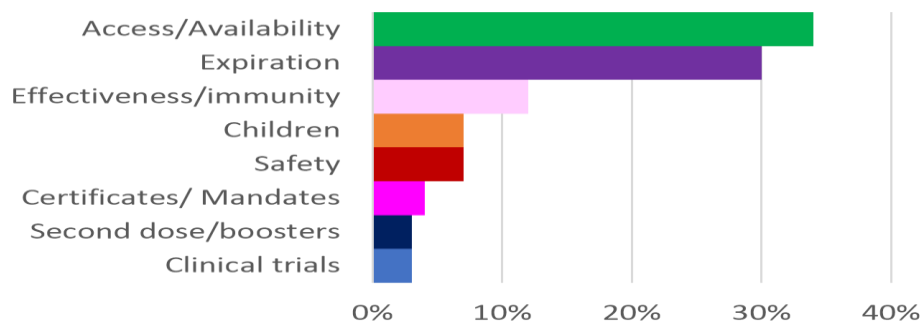
26 September 2022, Report 68

This is a weekly report of Covid-19 and vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Thanks to all who contribute to this report each week.

### KEY TRENDS

**Interest and engagement on COVID-19.** There was high interest in “clicks vaccination sites in Johannesburg” (+2000% compared to previous week); with high downloads of “vaccine certificate” (+2000%); and “list of covid vaccines approved by WHO” (+250%). Tweets about COVID-19 vaccines in the country generated 3.3k engagements (-50% compared to last week). Facebook posts about COVID-19 vaccines generated about 12k over the past week (similar to previous week). News articles about COVID-19 vaccines generated over 4.6k engagements (similar to the previous week). [\(Here\)](#), [\(Here\)](#), [\(Here\)](#), [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)

Share of engagement by vaccine subtopic, Twitter, digital news, selected Facebook channels, South Africa



**“Sixth COVID-19 wave delayed”.** There has been a delay in the sixth wave which was expected to start at the end of September or October, according to the experts. “The global delay in the sixth wave may very well signal the eventual end of the pandemic”. People were sceptical on social media, and their sentiments were “we want facts not possibilities”, “flogging the dead horse”, “it is all lies”, “fear mongering”, and “making us anxious”, but others laughed and joked about it, “the wave fizzled out!”. [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)

**“COVID-19 vaccines stock out”.** There has been reports of shortages of COVID-19 vaccines at private vaccination sites. One of them said “we booked boosters at Clicks only to be told on arrival there Pfizers available,” they assumed “the private site licenses had expired already” and “with the slow uptake it hasn’t been worth it for the sites or stores to renew their licenses.” “The public sites definitely have Pfizer stock. I spoke to one of them today, and they confirmed they have stock” but “private sites have less as the vaxxes are now part of our normal healthcare program and so are available at public health sites, clinics etc.” However, one person said “this is absolutely NOT the case, we have many Pfizer vaccines in SA, so many in fact that at the end of October we are looking at destroying over 8 million of them as they will have reached their expiry date.” [\(Here\)](#)

**Demand for booster doses.** After the SAHPRA extended the expiry date of more than 8,5 million Pfizer vaccines and confirmed that *“the vaccines are still completely safe and effective”*, several people have asked about the second vaccine boosters for the under 50-year-olds. [\(Here\)](#) Some people were excited, saying *“now they just need to open 2nd boosters to the under 50’s”*, *“Indeed! Hoping that with this extension of dates will include the other cohorts”* and *“Here's hoping!”* [\(Here\)](#) One person wanted to know *‘how long are we going to get the COVID booster? I received the 2<sup>nd</sup> booster last month.’* [\(Here\)](#) According to the experts, booster shots, especially for more vulnerable populations, were highly recommended to keep the pandemic at bay. [\(Here\)](#) However, *“people are no longer showing up at vaccination sites for primary jabs or booster shots.”* [\(Here\)](#) Many of them believe the pandemic is *“a thing of the past”*. [\(Here\)](#) *“We have re-established the vaxi taxi outreach programme, which is a mobile vaccination service’* to go where they congregate. [\(Here\)](#)

**Low interest in COVID.** The contact centre has seen a slight call reduction across all platforms this week.

- It has been pretty much business as usual at the contact centre and agents are mostly addressing general issues around vaccination certificates as well as citizens requiring their vaccination codes to be updated.
- There have been a few calls that were transferred to NHLS for input around medical issues as well as Covid-19 test results. Health calls have mainly been about minor side effects like fever and headaches etc. but these have also seen a reduction in volumes.
- Citizens have called enquiring around the availability of vaccines at the Clicks and Dis-Chem vaccination sites and reporting that some of these sites are no longer administering vaccines. The private sector site list has subsequently been updated.

**Mental health and COVID.** The mental health of the younger generation has reportedly plummeted, with vulnerable groups being worst off after COVID-19 with 33% of respondents depressed, 45% afraid and 29% lonely. [\(Here\)](#) *“Prolonged exposure to these burdens resulted in what some participants referred to as “Covid-burnout” – a sense of exhaustion affecting work and personal lives and resulting in reduced work satisfaction and difficulty in performing work tasks.”* [\(Here\)](#)

**Pertussis virus increase.** A total of 147 pertussis (whooping cough) cases has been notified in South Africa and 77% are children under 5 years and 79% under 3 years of age. The majority of the cases (42%) are in Western Cape. It spreads through respiratory excretions when an infected person coughs or sneezes. *“There was a sharp increase from July which could be as a result of decreased transmission related to NPIs to prevent the spread”*, according to the experts. [\(Here\)](#) *“My son had it at 2 months old, cough blood and was in ICU for a month.”*, *“I also suffered last month, I did not know what it was”*, *“Perhaps the vaccine has become useless”*, *“My daughter had it, it was the worst experience”*, and *“Thought all babies are vaccinated against this as babies”*. [\(Here\)](#)

**Monkeypox update.** Five cases of monkeypox have been detected in South Africa with no secondary cases linked to the confirmed cases. A total of 382 monkeypox laboratory tests (PCR) were done. Of these 268 people were South Africa, and 114 were from other African countries. While anyone can get monkeypox, there were still concerns about the stigma and disparities in the current monkeypox outbreak similar to the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. *“Unless health leaders heed the lessons of the past and act compassionately to reach vulnerable populations, these disparities could worsen.”* [\(Here\)](#)

**Adenovirus suspect.** A brief discussion on social media about childhood immunization highlighted that some people in South Africa believe *their children were infected with the Adenovirus*. One person said, *“My kids are sick with Adenovirus.”* [\(Here\)](#) In May, the WHO reported 650 probable cases of severe acute hepatitis under six years. To date, there have been no cases officially reported in the African region. [\(Here\)](#)

**Measles outbreak.** The measles outbreak in Zimbabwe is concerning as the caseload rise to 6444 with more than 700 deaths in four months. People are also concerned about vaccine hesitancy. [\(Here\)](#) *“The country has embarked on a public awareness campaign to fight vaccine hesitancy to ensure the success of its measles immunisation drive launch.”* Sentiments in South Africa included *“And we still allow them to enter the border at will and still let them use our taxpayer funded health care system for free.”* [\(Here\)](#)

**Polio outbreak.** After the polio outbreak in the US and UK, there are fears that the spread of the disabling and life-threatening disease would spread to South Africa through tourism and travel. Some people are already calling for the borders to be closed. *Misinformation about polio was also spreading fast about “a vaccine-derived disease”, that “any strategy they set will centre on vaccination” and “there is no cure or treatment” for the disease.* ([Here](#))

**Ebola outbreak.** Uganda calls for calm as the country experiences its fourth deaths from a highly contagious Ebola virus. ([Here](#)) “Uganda is no stranger to Ebola. We can halt the spread of infections”. Some people in South Africa *have expressed on social media their anxiety about the spread through cross border movements.* ([Here](#)) “There was also a strong contingent of users from Uganda and surrounding countries that are claiming the *Ebola outbreak is not a threat or is not real*”. ([Here](#))

## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

**Waterberg districts, Limpopo.** People have welcomed the Phelophepa Healthcare train pop-up vaccination sites in their communities in support of the Limpopo Department of Health. The sites have been in Mookgophong, Waterberg districts for almost three weeks. However, others were not interested. *“The pandemic is long gone and forgotten”, “That one is a thing of the past” and others surprised that “people are still on about this?”*

## MISINFORMATION

~~**MISINFO:** The second COVID Vaccine death reported by SAHPRA is one of hundreds of those who have died from being vaccinated.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to back up this claim. SAHPRA was transparent because it was the second clearly attributable death. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** COVID vaccinations make you more susceptible to serious illness and death and most COVID deaths now are triple vaccinated people.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support these claims. More people did lose their lives during COVID – due to COVID not the vaccine see [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Monkey Pox and Chicken Pox are the same thing and used to spread fear.~~ **TRUTH:** Monkeypox is an orthopoxvirus, while chickenpox is a herpes virus, shingles are not the same virus. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**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:** Monkeypox is just the scam name for the side effects of the Pfizer covid vaccine.~~ **TRUTH:** Monkeypox is a viral disease and not an auto-immune diseases so it cannot be caused by a side effect to a vaccine and the vaccines do not have any live virus in them. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Monkey pox is the new Covid and is 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 virus to COVID. See [here](#) and [here](#)

~~**MISINFO:** COVID Regulations been dropped so no need to get vaccinated now and they don't help anyway.~~ **TRUTH:** It is still recommended to ventilate spaces and get vaccinated as it will prevent serious illness. 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.

### **COVID-19 is over**

Claims that the COVID-19 pandemic has ended have led to differing narratives regarding the need to continue to need any preventative measures in place, most specifically COVID-19 vaccinations. However, new variants are still a potential threat to a significant reemergence of the disease.

### **Communication intervention**

As COVID-19 waves continue to ebb and flow, and new variants are still a potential threat to a significant reemergence of the disease, it is necessary to highlight the vaccine's ability to mitigate severe symptoms and complications from contracting the disease without inoculation, and how it can protect individuals from new strains of COVID that may become prevalent.

### **COVID-19 content**

Flu & COVID vaccines [LINK](#)  
Ivermectin to treat COVID-19 [LINK](#)

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

**Contact Centre:** The RCCE will continue promoting the Contact Centre number 0800 029 999 and its operational days and hours, on all platforms, and continue informing people that COVID-19 still exists and remains a constant threat. As of 21 September 2022, there were 1558 new Covid-19 cases and 23 deaths.

**Monkeypox:** Five monkeypox cases have been confirmed in South Africa as of 26 September 2022. In collaboration with relevant partners, the Department of Health has developed messages to prevent further spread and to destigmatize harmful perceptions about people who are infected with the disease. The RCCE will continue to educate the public about the disease, its prevention and care.

**Polio:** The RCCE team, in collaboration with UNICEF, has drafted a preparedness risk communication and community engagement strategy with communication toolkits in preparation for polio outbreak. The RCCE will continue to address information gaps, fears and concerns through relevant communication structures and platforms.

**Measles.** The Department of Health is planning a mass vaccination campaign to be held in February 2023, to control measles, prevent outbreaks and deaths, as well as to find over 78 000 children who are missing both the first and second doses of measles vaccinations, in order to reach the vaccination rates of 95%.

**EPI:** The Department of Health and its partners are implementing the Side-by-Side campaign focusing on Child Health integrated services to promote the expanded immunization programme (EPI), which includes the promotion and immunization for Polio and Measles. The RCCE will continue supporting immunizations through focused messaging, community engagement and social listening.

**Booster doses.** The RCCE technical working group and its demand creation team will implement a booster dose campaign before the festive season. The communication Strategy has been developed, presented to the RCCE and provincial health communicators. The RCCE will communicate the schedule for booster doses.

**Vaccination sites.** The RCCE will publicize the vaccination sites for booster doses. The public is encouraged to check and confirm the operational vaccination sites, especially in the private sector, through EVDS ([Here](#)), Find-my-Jab ([Here](#)) or Contact Centre 0800 029 999. The private sector vaccination site list has subsequently been updated. ([Here](#))

## 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
- **Prækelt.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

SACoronavirus	<a href="#">(Here)</a>
EVDS	<a href="#">(Here)</a>
Find My Job	<a href="#">(Here)</a>
Real 411	<a href="#">(Here)</a>
HealthCheck	060 012 3456
Contact Centre	0800 029 999
Email	info@vaccinesupport.org.za

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.

*The report was drafted by Charity Bhengu and reviewed by Nombulelo Leburu after a Bi-Weekly Social Listening Meeting. The data for this report was collected by NDOH, National COVID Contact Centre, NICD, UNICEF, Real 411 and HST.*

### Contact:

Nombulelo Leburu, National Department of Health	<a href="mailto:nombulelo.leburu@health.gov.za">nombulelo.leburu@health.gov.za</a>	082 444 9503
Peter Benjamin, HealthEnabled	<a href="mailto:peter@healthenabled.org">peter@healthenabled.org</a>	082 829 3353
Charity Bhengu, National Department of Health	<a href="mailto:charity.bhengu@health.gov.za">charity.bhengu@health.gov.za</a>	083 679 7424