

# South Africa Covid-19 & Vaccine Social Listening Report 29 August 2022, Report 64

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

## KEY TRENDS

**Growing concern about low vaccine uptake.** Experts have warned that vaccine fatigue, mixed messaging, and the bombardment of information may have contributed to the low vaccine uptake being experienced worldwide. People are *“overwhelmed by COVID-19 vaccine information, and the younger ones are slow to take boosters”*, according to a recent Canadian study ([Here](#)).

Another threat to vaccine booster uptakes has been identified rooted in mixed messaging, based on a study in the UK. *“The idea that “COVID is over” and using terms such as “post-pandemic” may have also worked against vaccines ([Here](#)) and “Messaging about boosters should be clear about the effectiveness of the vaccines and the protection they offer” ([Here](#)).*

Since the lifting of most Covid-19 non pharmaceutical interventions and most regulations, so too was there a decline in the general vaccine updates in South Africa. Most people feel that *“COVID is no longer a threat” ([Here](#))* and are surprised to read about new COVID cases; *“New cases of what? From where?” and “Is covid back again?” ([Here](#))*

**Immense Covid-19 impact on children.** There is great concern about the increasing number of orphans over the past two years, as a result of Covid-19. According to new evidence describing alarming patterns of childhood vulnerability, there are significant burdens on families exposed to Covid-19 associated deaths, and parenting, economic and schooling support should be strengthened to protect children ([Here](#)). Globally, more than 10 million children have lost a parent or caregiver to Covid-19; 2.5 million children in Africa, and over 200 000 children in South Africa, have been bereaved by the death of a parent, caregiver by 15 August 2022 ([Here](#)). The SA RCCE Social Listening forum supports the urgent call to integrate care for orphaned children into every national Covid-19 response; *“We need to make sure that children who are in this level of vulnerability get the support they need.”*

**Vaccine hesitancy affecting Human papillomavirus (HPV).** Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy is spilling over to routine vaccinations, affecting the schools’ cervical cancer immunization programme with only 3 million girls vaccinated since 2014 ([Here](#)). *“Misinformation, myths, fear, minimal trust and lack of access to credible information are the main contributing factors that are driving the public perceptions against HPV vaccination further.” ([Here](#)).* The sentiments confirmed low confidence in the vaccine ([Here](#)) and *“Another scam again and our grannies never used any of these vaccines” ([Here](#)).*

**Urgent need to increase demand for routine childhood vaccination .** The Expanded Programme on Immunisation to ensure that 90% of all children are fully immunised by the age of one year have been affected by low vaccine uptake. The vaccination coverage declined to 81.4% for children vaccinated with doses scheduled up to 12 months, i.e. up to the second dose of measles vaccine. Vaccination coverage for a child fully vaccinated up to 18 months was 76.8% ([Here](#)). The poorest performing districts were Pixley ka Seme (53%), OR Tambo (54%), Capricorn (62%), Fezile Dabi (63%) and Ilembe (64%). The sentiments were *“leave our children alone” and “Don’t vac” ([Here](#)).* Locally, the most talked about were *“the vaccination of more than 10 000 young people between 12-17 years old in Eastern Cape”* made top tweets, and high interest in the social listening report, and news about a 14-year-old Eastern Cape learner allegedly facing arm amputation due to Covid-19 vaccination broke the internet ([Here](#)).

**Increased diabetes incidents due to Covid-19.** Several studies suggest that adults with Covid-19 have an increased risk of being diagnosed with diabetes. Children less than 18 years old with Covid-19 were found to have a higher risk of developing diabetes more than 30 days after contracting the virus than those without Covid-19 and those with pre-pandemic acute respiratory infections ([Here](#)). In the US onset of type 2 diabetes (T2D) among youth under 21 increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic ([Here](#)). However, the impact of the pandemic on the overall incidence of type 1 diabetes remains unknown ([Here](#)).

In South Africa, there were claims of people being diagnosed with Diabetes after Covid-19, saying “*many people infected by COVID had been treated/diagnosed with diabetes*”, with more questions about “*why are people developing diabetes after covid*” ([Here](#)).

**Neurological conditions due to Covid-19.** According to estimates, up to a third of Covid-19 survivors may suffer from neurological or mental disorders ([Here](#)). “*Covid-19 survivors remain at higher risk of psychotic disorders, dementia seizures, and similar conditions including “brain fog” for at least two years.*” ([Here](#)). However, “*anxiety and depression occurred more frequently after COVID than other respiratory infections.*” ([Here](#)). In response to this report, there were four negative comments regarding “*fear-mongering*” on social media ([Here](#)).

**Concerning reports about cardiovascular diseases due to Covid-19.** According to a report about excessive blood clots associated with both acute Covid-19 infection and some of the vaccines, men over 50 were at the greatest risk of cardio vascular diseases after a Covid-19 infection ([Here](#)). “*Nearly half of men in this group had visible signs of atherosclerosis in the coronary arteries of the heart,*” according to researchers in the Human Molecular Biology Unit in the School of Biomedical Sciences, at the University of Free State (UFS), South Africa ([Here](#)).

**Call to stop Covid-19 vaccination at school.** Some education activists criticized a call to scrap the Covid-19 vaccine school drive, saying it was “*too early*” to dismiss the pandemic ([Here](#)). The parents had requested a halt to Covid-19 after several schools sent consent letters to their homes asking permission to vaccinate their children ([Here](#)). Their sentiments were “*we don’t need this anymore*”. One parent said, “*I am vaccinated and the way I felt after getting jabbed was like a bad case of flu*” ([Here](#)). Covid-19 vaccines saved 20 million people in the first year ([Here](#)).

**General sense of non-urgency about monkeypox.** “*People are comparing monkeypox with shingles*”, and said it was “*caused by the vaccine*” but others correcting them “*monkeypox is not shingles. Please educate yourself*”. Some accused the “*medical fraternity*” of trying to instil fear in the public and “*push for them to get all these jabs whilst trying their best to cover up for the adverse effect people are now suffering from*”. They also complained that the monkeypox reporting was “*fear-mongering*”. People were not taking monkeypox seriously and “*said government must stop the lies, this monkeypox is rubbish*”, “*it is not as deadly*” and “*the public isn’t going to fall again to scare tactics.*” ([Here](#)), ([Here](#)) and ([Here](#)).

**More fears of vaccine inequity with monkeypox outbreak.** The WHO is concerned that the vaccine inequity experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic could be repeated now with the current monkeypox outbreak ([Here](#)). There were eight sentiments about this, of which one was negative. The experts said, “*vaccination for Monkeypox was not yet required in South Africa*” ([Here](#)). Health workers were on high alert for any individuals presenting with an unexplained acute rash or skin lesions ([Here](#)). Some of the sentiments to this report were “*we do not fear monkeypox as much as they feared COVID-19*” ([Here](#)), “*We’re only at risk from the evil media and government*” and “*the scientists who are causing unnecessary panic*” ([Here](#)). Others said that monkeypox messages should prioritize abstinence and stigma; “*why isn’t abstinence being recommended, first??*” ([Here](#)) and “*Diseases do not discriminate*” ([Here](#)).

**Covid-19 top posts and news interest.** Novak Djokovic stance on vaccines is still the most talked about whenever he is mentioned ([Here](#)). The sentiments included “*his perspective puts him at odds with the CDC’s absolutism.*” ([Here](#)). A call for responsible online engagement - “*COVID-19 pandemic is the perfect storm for disinformation*” - also received attention ([Here](#)). A news headline, “*A common thread between the COVID-19 and HIV/Aids pandemic*” about misinformation which “*has spread just as quickly as the virus*” received positive reaction ([Here](#)).

A controversial tweet post demanding “*every person who has tweeted Get the Vaccine it will stop you from getting COVID needs to have their account suspended for misinformation*” ([Here](#)) went viral with 3116 retweets, 116 quote tweets and 12.3 likes. Most of the sentiments were also misleading “*Never was a vaccine – did not fit the definition*” ([Here](#)).

**More WhatsApp Open Questions.** A number of questions received this week were about Covid-19 vaccine side effects (17.6%), vaccine certificates (23,5%), employment (17,6%) and other general question (41,2%) which included “can a newborn get vaccinated?”, “can a swollen prostate get cured?”, “do morning after pills prevent one from getting pregnant?”, “I want to know how to reduce blood pressure”, “how to control diabetes” and “what to use to control hypertension besides medication”.

**Covid-19 Call Centre still operative.** The call volumes are continuing to decline. Some of these calls were about “vaccine side effects”, “not feeling well”, “what can I do?”, “what is the isolation period”, “where can I get tested”, asking about “vaccine sites still operating”, or codes for vaccine certificates, and how to download “vaccine certificates”. Most of the people required the certificates for travelling or to gain access to the workplace as some of the employers still require vaccination proof. The centre received good feedback from its users who were impressed about their efficient service.

**Community feedback on Covid-19.** The organisations supporting Covid-19 initiatives continue to give community feedback on misinformation about the disease and vaccine, but most of them have shifted their focus towards “recovery” which meant that “communities must learn to live with COVID-19”, according to the Red Cross. A vaccine awareness campaign was conducted at a taxi rank in Inkomazi, Mpumalanga this week. A vaccination promotion was also done targeting migrants in an informal settlement, Gezina in Pretoria. A total of 303 people were reached during the campaign.

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## MISINFORMATION

**MISINFO:** ~~COVID vaccines are not safe for children.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support the claim. Vaccines have been found to be safe for children. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

**MISINFO:** ~~Covid vaccines cause heart attacks and inflammation of the heart.~~ **TRUTH:** While there are some cases of inflammation of the heart (myocarditis, the risk is very low, see [here](#)) there is no evidence to support claims that Covid-19 vaccines directly cause heart attacks. 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 effect are mild and self-resolving. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). SA has excellent adverse reporting mechanisms backed by evidence see [here](#) for credible local site on adverse reactions.

**MISINFO:** ~~The COVID Vaccine death reported by SAHPRA is not the first and hundreds more have died from being vaccinated.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to back up this claim. SAHPRA was transparent because it was the first clearly attributable death. See [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 and 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:** ~~COVID Regulations been dropped so no need to get vaccinated now and they don't help anyway.~~ **TRUTH:** It's still recommended to ventilate spaces and get vaccinated as it will prevent serious illness. 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 but it is a different disease and different virus to Covid-19. See [here](#) and [here](#).

**MISINFO:** ~~Messages saying you have participated in a COVID drug trial asking you to take action to get paid are legitimate.~~ **TRUTH:** Participation in any legitimate clinical trial in South Africa requires informed consent, and any payments have to be approved by an ethics committee and will usually only cover transport. See [here](#) for all the policies followed locally and [here](#) for informed consent.

**MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines cause infertility and erectile dysfunction.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support these claims. Covid-19 however can impair sexual performance. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

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## 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-19 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):

### Key Monkeypox Misinformation Trends

- Monkeypox is not a threat because it is not lethal: *Reports of monkeypox cases in Africa have continued to drive conversations regarding the disease, but a significant share of the social media community has responded with little to no concern about the severity of the disease or showed any interest in supporting the efforts to mitigate the spread.*
- Clade lib only infects men: *Conversations in social messaging apps have revealed that there have been misinterpretations of Clade IIb having a high infection rate among MSM and new rumors have populated based on the assumptions.*

### Key COVID-19 Misinformation Trends

Covid-19 vaccines harm pregnant women/infants: *A recent surge in the misinformation narrative around pregnancies and infant mortalities populated over the last seven days on social messaging apps that suggests there are links between pregnancy, birth, and infant health complications and the COVID-19 vaccine.*

### COVID-19 VFA content

- Flu & COVID vaccines [\[LINK\]](#)
- Ivermectin to treat COVID-19 [\[LINK\]](#)
- Childhood vaccination safety [\[LINK\]](#)
- Fertility and Covid19 vaccine [\[LINK\]](#)

### Monkeypox VFA content

- Latest Monkeypox VFA content: Monkeypox explainer [\[LINK\]](#)
- WHO Monkeypox FAQ and Factsheet [\[LINK\]](#)

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## PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Maintain targeted interventions.** Create more interactive platforms for people to ask questions about vaccine safety and counter misinformation about vaccine adverse effects.
- **Enhance youth vaccination.** Stronger partnerships with youth organisations in the communities and nationally to be able to address the gap in youth vaccinations were also recommended.
- **Information gaps.** Address fears of negative side effects of vaccination during pregnancy and share evidence on the risk of Covid-19 and its adverse pregnancy outcomes.
- **Routine vaccination.** Highlight the benefits of childhood vaccination, address the Covid-19 negative attitudes about vaccines affecting all vaccinations, also received attention

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## 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

### OTHER RESOURCES

SA Corona virus website  
Real 411 to report misinfo

[Here](#)  
[Here](#)

- **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-19 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 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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