

South Africa COVID-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report 23 November 2021, Report 28

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This is a weekly report of COVID & vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Further info [here](#).

KEY TRENDS

- **Public concern about mandatory COVID-19 vaccination in the workplace:** There is growing concern about several SA companies mandating or planning to mandate compulsory vaccination of their employees. The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) received complaints following dismissal of employees because of being unvaccinated (see [Here](#)). The Party of Action shared a [tweet](#) claiming that COVID-19 vaccinations are part of a “satanic plot”.
- **Vooma Vaccination Weekend increased vaccination numbers.** On the weekend 12 – 14 November over a quarter of a million vaccine doses were given, over double a usual weekend, though less than the ambitious target ([Here](#)). The seven Vooma Weekend social media banners posted on NDOH Facebook this week promoting vaccine acceptance received more positive public comments in agreement with vaccine update but also questioning the government’s support ([Here](#), and [Here](#)).
- **Public queries on Vooma Vouchers:** R100 grocery vouchers are now offered to people over 50 years old vaccinating for the first time. Many like this, while some call it bribery. Many people younger than 50 are requesting to receive the Vooma vouchers as well. There are also conversations that R100 is too small amount and it is a shame to coerce the poor and needy with a pittance ([Here](#)).
- **Foreign nationals welcome vaccination:** Many foreign nationals in SA have expressed gratitude for the opportunity to vaccinate. It has been suggested for

the Government to “be at borders and airport to vaccinate people” ([Here](#)). Out the 946 reactions on a poster encouraging *foreign Nationals living in SA to vaccinate anywhere*, 819 were positive and 127 negative, e.g. “Government keeps giving South Africans the middle finger” ([Here](#)).

- **Covid-19 Vaccine detoxing:** There have been conversations on social media around ways to remove or “flush out” the vaccine from the body ([Here](#)).
- **Restrictions for unvaccinated people:** Frustrations around the “Freedom of movement” due to real or feared vaccine mandates continues to cause a stir in online conversations ([Here](#)).
- **Continued public queries on vaccine safety and effectiveness:** Despite efforts to educate and inform the public about the safety of vaccines, many continue to remain sceptical of the efficacy and risk of side effects.
- **Concern regarding the Sisonke booster shot** for health workers who received the Johnson & Johnson single-dose vaccine. Does this mean that just one dose isn’t good enough? Will we all have to keep taking Covid vaccines every few months? Many health workers are resistant to being on another trial, and others including the SA Medical Association want the choice of either a J&J or Pfizer as the second dose ([here](#) and [here](#)). There has been an increase in queries to the Covid Hotline from Sisonke Trial participants requesting their vaccination codes as many have discovered that their vaccination from phase 1 were not captured at the vaccination sites, which has required back capturing.
- **Covid-19 Fourth Wave:** There is considerable concern that a 4th wave of Covid in SA could be very damaging. National government is working closely with the provinces to prepared for the expected fourth wave of Covid ([Here](#)). Others are predicting that the 4th wave will be less than previous waves of infection.
- **Effects of the pandemic on Women:** The Covid pandemic has had a crippling effect globally, particularly on women in many spheres – health, economically, security, social protection and escalating poverty levels ([Here](#)).

LOCAL / DISTRICT / PROVINCIAL ISSUES

This new section summarises social listening from areas around the country. For more information on reports from 14 health districts, see [here](#).

- **Ekurhuleni, Gauteng:** The turnout at Vooma Weekend was impressive in the district. There was an increase number of 60+ age group who were motivated by the availability of Vooma Vouchers. Unemployed people are also demanding vouchers for everyone vaccinated for the first time. The vaccine uptake among children is low, probably due to them being busy with exams at school.
- **Amathole, Eastern Cape.** There seems to be a decrease among all communities in vaccination uptake, even during the Vooma vaccination weekend. The youth who are largely unvaccinated are requesting to be vaccinated at sportsfields, where they usually gather. The turnout for vaccination at the designated vaccination sites was only good in the Mbashe sub-district.

- **Dr Ruth Segomotsing Mompoti, North West:** This week, we managed to drive more traffic to the vaccination sites. Some Rastafarians are anti-vaccine, and they influence each other not to take the jab. There are children between 12 – 17 years old who are not showing up for vaccination because their parent are against it.
- **Bojanala, North West:** There are still high numbers of rural people who don't have access to the vaccination sites and they only go to town very rarely. While they are in town, they only focus on what they came to buy not vaccination. The health system must provide transport or the vaccination popup sites nearer where people live, not just in the urban area.
- **Mangaung, Free State:** The R100 grocery vouchers would be more effective if it was to be available for all first time vaxxers. Barriers to vaccination include experiencing transport fare challenges, worry of side effects and people not being motivated enough.
- **uMkanyakude, KZN:** There remains much resistance to vaccination. Feedback from the vaccinated people. 'It's been a week since I vaccinated, and my arm is still painful. As a result, I don't think that I will be recommending the vaccine to my peers.' "Why do we vaccinate if we can still get infected by the virus after vaccinating? This means the vaccine doesn't work." Struggling to find pro-vax ambassadors amongst the community members who will confidently advocate for the vaccination.
- **Harry Gwala, KZN:** Vaccine acceptance is increasing as we have started the 12 – 17 years old, targeting schools. Parents are encouraging their children to vaccinate and children are responding to their parents. This exercise was more in rural areas than in the townships. The youth in the rural areas are also responding positively to the calls to be vaccinated. There were many political celebrations and people who attended those celebrations might be at risk. Need to involve youth organizations like student organizations to mobilize youth for vaccination and organize pop up site in the venues where they gather.
- **Garden Route, Western Cape:** People are not well informed about the booster shot, thinking that the first dose did not work properly. There is also a decrease in numbers of people wearing masks after being vaccinated. Community mobilisers have requested support with pamphlets.
- **Ehlanzeni, Mpumalanga:** Vaccines administered in the last 7 days were 25 000, an increase from the election period. Vaccine acceptance is increasing once again. This is a sign that major events do affect vaccination numbers positively or negatively. Females are still vaccinating more than males. The age group 18 -34 years vaccinated the most this week. The age group of 60 years plus (the highest risk group) had the lowest vaccination numbers this week.
- **Namaqua, Northern Cape:** The willingness amongst the 12 – 17-year-olds is surprisingly greater than those over 18 years old. People are willing to take the vaccine because they want to be with their loved ones during the Christmas holidays, avoid another hard lockdown and possible fourth wave of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The R100 voucher incentive seems to have the desired effect because many unvaccinated people in the over 60 age group came out in larger numbers to take the vaccine. A town like Komaggas in the Namakwa District of the Northern Cape is without signal for connectivity, but vaccination roll-out was possible thanks to the generosity of a local IT

company owner who donated vouchers for the staff to keep the laptops running.

- **OR Tambo, E Cape:** Increasing number of young people are scared of a lockdown during the festive period, some are concerned that they would be required to produce vaccination cards to be admitted to university. Those who are coming forward are those whose vaccinated parents did not get side effects.
- **City of Johannesburg, Gauteng:** Vaccine acceptance is increasing. One of the reasons is that certain companies have made it compulsory for employees to vaccinate, many of them are vaccinating to save their jobs, and most of them are women.
- **KZN Health staff:** While health districts in KZN are doing comparatively well, the public healthcare system in the province is plagued by staff shortages, long waiting times, poor infection control, and some cases, dysfunctional filing systems. The Health MEC says that 15 000 KZN children have been vaccinated against Covid. Schools are currently going through exams and parents are still working. We anticipate that after exam and during the festive season we will have more parents bringing their children forward.

MISINFORMATION

- **MISINFO:** ~~J&J vaccine needing a booster jab shows that it doesn't work~~ **TRUTH:** Many vaccines have booster jabs, and trials now show that the J&J vaccine is even more effective with a booster. See [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Those who are vaccinated will die within two years.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim at all. Vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of dying from Covid ([here](#)).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines don't work — if they did they would stop us from getting Covid to begin with.~~ **TRUTH:** If you have been vaccinated you are less likely to get Covid, and if you do get Covid it will most likely be far less severe. Unvaccinated people are more likely to be infected with Covid, have severe illness and to die from Covid. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Covid levels were manipulated to allow the local government elections to take place.~~ **TRUTH:** Levels of Covid were low in the lead up to the local government elections. Figures from NICD can be checked [here](#). Also government and IEC took many steps to mitigate impact. See [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines cause infertility in men and women and negatively impacts their sexual performance.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support these claims but getting Covid can negatively impact fertility and sexual function. See [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Foreigners will be deported if they try and get vaccinated.~~ **TRUTH:** While vulnerable people especially may be fearful, anyone in South Africa can be vaccinated, regardless of nationality. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Being vaccinated while pregnant will make your baby deformed.~~ **TRUTH:** Pregnant women should get vaccinated as the risk of having Covid while pregnant poses far greater risks to the baby than potential

side effects of vaccines. Speak to your health care provider if there are specific concerns. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Continue with the production of information for community mobilisers to help them debunk rampant misinformation in communities.
- Continue providing accurate information with verified statistics on the risk of contracting the virus and having severe symptoms after vaccination; and also providing information that demonstrates that the risks associated with contracting COVID-19 far outweigh the risks of vaccination, and why vaccines are considered safe and effective.
- Increase communication through Covid-19 champions, i.e. those who have gotten the vaccine and/or influencers championing communication to the public as living testimonies.
- Create clear, consistent messaging about vaccine developments and communicate often about what is known and unknown.
- Emphasize hopeful messages highlighting vaccines are crucial for ending the pandemic and share solidarity messages around protective measure and safe behaviours
- Emphasise motivation for people to get vaccination: they want to be with their loved ones during the Christmas holidays, avoid another hard lockdown and possible fourth wave of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

ISSUES RAISED FOR FOLLOW-UP:

- **Bojanala, North West:** They require permission to put the emblem of DoH on their reflectors as well as the DGMT logo. They request to be included in the plenary meetings as they are on the ground most of the time, and want to add inputs and suggestions.
- **Ehlanzeni, Mpumalanga;** Require quick access to print pamphlets and posters to distribute as per the particular need in each area weekly; engage a pro-longed community engagement teams including the district communicators, the people who have the knowledge and learn more and more about the community daily.
- **Garden Route, Western Cape:** Government and department of health should consider giving all first time vaccinated the vouchers. It's December and most young men are going to the mountains for circumcision, they should be encouraged to come for vaccination and should be encouraged by their leaders to be vaccinated. Department of Health should engage traditional leaders about the matter.
- **City of Johannesburg, Gauteng.** Support the churches especially during the festive season.

- **Ekurhuleni, Gauteng:** Without proper planning with local people, popups are sometimes located where few people would manage to come. Need to identify busy crowded places and the right day of the week to put up popups, and advertise in the community before the popup starts.
- **Amathole, Eastern Cape:** Requesting transport for health officials in the district be expedited.
- **OR Tambo, Eastern Cape:** Requesting branding and vaccine IEC material addressing myths
- **Dr Ruth Segomotsing Mompati, North West:** Advise the department to assist with transport, Imologa and the Dept of Health to share the marketing materials.
- **Mangaung, Free State:** The R100 grocery vouchers would be more effective if it was to be available for all first time vaxxers. The use of incentives such as free Wi-Fi, airtime or data could be used to motivate SA citizens to vaccinate and to meet their immediate needs with R100 grocery vouchers.

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 Hotline:** Reports from the national Covid call centre
- **Org:** NDOH Covid 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 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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