

# South Africa Covid-19 & Vaccine Social Listening Report

## 11 July 2022, Report 57

This is a weekly report of Covid-19 & vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Further information that provides the background to this report is available [here](#). Please give feedback on these reports in the brief survey [here](#).

### KEY TRENDS

**“Covid is over”.** Many people wrongly believe that the end of restrictions means that Covid is over ([Here](#)) and there is no need to vaccinate ([Here](#) and [here](#)).

**Continuing legacy of Covid-19.** Globally reported cases have increased nearly 30% over the past two weeks while testing has reduced dramatically in many countries ([Here](#)). While most people welcome not wearing a mask anymore, others on Department of Health social media say masks should still be worn *“when more people have long-Covid or post-Covid conditions”* ([Here](#)) and they would continue wearing masks since there were still new cases of Covid-19 ([Here](#) and [here](#)). Others were concerned about the timing, asking if the *“the department realizes that we are in the midst of a flu season and that people also die from flu or is Covid the new name for flu”* ([Here](#)). The effects of the pandemic and its impact on the country’s HIV/AIDS programme will be felt for a long time ([Here](#)). The pandemic had disrupted access to treatment of chronic illnesses. *“This is not only unique to HIV medicine. The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically affected our healthcare system. There has been significant damage in what we term ‘collateral damage’* ([Here](#)).

**Disputed ventilation precaution.** Despite evidence of airborne Covid-19 transmission requiring good ventilation of public spaces ([Here](#)), posts educating people about this ([Here](#)) are frequently challenged, *“Since when is this Covid thing airborne bullsh\*t talk here on your page”* ([Here](#)).

**Leadership spreading vaccine disinformation.** There has been considerable discussion of a video circulating of the African National Congress secretary general Ace Magashule telling a crowd of people expressing that he did not vaccinate ([Here](#)). Some echo this message – a post on a Department of Health poster on Covid statistics says *“Ace Magashule please come and wake these people up”* ([Here](#)).

**Media literacy and fake news.** More than 75% of South Africans say they regularly come across political news they think is false. Eight out of 10 South Africans believe that disinformation (or “fake news”) is a problem or a serious problem in the country ([Here](#)). Training to combat fake news by reading media texts critically has proven helpful in other countries, *“Research has shown that making people more media literate can help reduce the spread of disinformation”* ([Here](#)).

**Covid-19 misinformation hurting routine vaccination.** There is considered fake news on Covid-19 in SA, which is fed by foreign influencers producing vaccine disinformation since before the pandemic ([Here](#)). This politicization of the Covid jabs has contributed to the decline in routine immunizations for measles, polio, and other dangerous vaccine-preventable diseases globally ([Here](#) and [here](#)). *“More parents are questioning the necessity of routine vaccinations for young*



## MISINFORMATION

~~**MISINFO:** Now that Covid regulations been dropped there is no need to get vaccinated.~~

**TRUTH:** With the Covid regulations ending, vaccination is even more important. Covid-19 is still widespread and killing people every day. Vaccination is the main way to protect yourself and your family. It's still recommended to wear masks in indoor public spaces and to ventilate rooms. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** The only reason government is still pushing COVID vaccines is because they want to get rid of old stock.~~ **TRUTH:** Getting vaccinated continues to be important to help limit variants developing and help prevent you from getting seriously ill. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** People who have been vaccinated are more likely to get seriously ill from Covid-19.~~ **TRUTH:** The evidence does not support this claim. People who have been vaccinated are far less likely to experience severe symptoms. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

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

~~**MISINFO:** Monkeypox is just the new Covid-19 scam to control and or kill us OR monkeypox is the scam name for the side effects of the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine.~~ **TRUTH:** Monkeypox is a viral disease and not an auto-immune disease, so it cannot be a side effect of a vaccine and the vaccines do not have any live virus in them. Monkeypox is not new but recently has mutated to be more contagious and has spread to SA. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** "You have participated in a Covid test and you will get paid (if you do something)", sent in a text to your phone.~~ **TRUTH:** These messages are scams. 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 an explanation of informed consent.

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines have a tracker chip to track your movements.~~ **TRUTH:** This is wrong; it's a scare conspiracy theory with no truth. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Ivermectin is an effective treatment for Covid-19.~~ **TRUTH:** The SA Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) carried out a study into the use of Ivermectin and concluded that "there is currently no credible evidence to support a therapeutic role for Ivermectin in Covid-19". They therefore ended the trial early. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines side effects are being under reported and can kill you. The SA Adverse reactions site shows how many have died!~~ **TRUTH:** This is false. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). SA has excellent adverse event reporting mechanisms backed by evidence (see [here](#) for a credible local site on adverse reactions). The SA Health Products Regulatory Authority has conducted research and found that no one in SA has died due to Covid-19 vaccines ([Here](#)).

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines are dangerous and are 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](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Pfizer's own data shows over 1,291 side effects of the covid vaccine.~~ **TRUTH:** A report from 2021 did have a long list of potential side effects, but these were NOT side effects of their Covid-19 vaccine. It was a list of potential side effects that the safety study was watching out for. The vaccine is safe and side effects are mostly mild. 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):

### Key COVID-19 Misinformation Trends

- COVIDbResurgenceisa fear-mongering tactics
- Using Ivermectin with COVID-19 vax helps sideeffects

### Key Disease Misinformation Trends

- Monkeypox is Mutating in Vaccinated Individuals

### Information Gaps

- Are the monkeypox strains more dangerous?

### Viral Facts resources

- Vaccines protect against serious complications from COVID-19 and new variants ([Here](#))
- COVID-19 has not disappeared ([Here](#))

Gavi resources to build vaccine confidence ([Here](#))

Viral Facts tools to counter vaccine hesitancy ([Here](#))

---

## PROPOSED ACTION FOR RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Build confidence in all vaccines.** Concern about the new Covid vaccines is leading to hesitance on all vaccines, with more parents now not taking their children for routine immunization. Communication should be produced explaining the public health benefit of all vaccines, especially long-trusted childhood ones.

**Stay safe.** With the ending of Covid regulations, few people are wearing masks, ventilating or taking other steps to reduce infections. While they are not required, these practices still provide protect against infection by Covid, influenza and other communicable diseases. This should be emphasised in communications disseminated widely.

**Monkeypox communication.** Produce and share content on the monkeypox outbreak to manage public concern.

**Fake news training.** Fake news about Covid-19 and vaccine is widespread in SA. Various courses in media literacy and 'pre-bunking' of misinformation have been developed by UNICEF and others. SA should consider running training on this to community mobilisers, Vax Champs and others who may be interested.

---

---

## 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:** 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-19 Comms:** a network of communications specialists producing 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

Background info for this report [Here](#)  
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, 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.

**Contributors to this report** through writing and inputs include the following members, who also participated in this week’s discussions co-chaired by government and civil society; NDOH, Free State DOH, KwaZulu-Natal DOH, NICD, UNICEF, Real411, University of Free State, Right To Care, Project Last Mile, Community Constituency Forum, Health Systems Trust, DG Murray Trust, and Covid Comms.

**This week’s drafting team:** Herkulaas Combrink, Charity Bhengu, William Bird and Peter Benjamin.

### Contact:

Nombulelo Leburu, National Department of Health  
Peter Benjamin, HealthEnabled  
Charity Bhengu, National Department of Health

[nombulelo.leburu@health.gov.za](mailto:nombulelo.leburu@health.gov.za) 082 444 9503  
[peter@healthenabled.org](mailto:peter@healthenabled.org) 082 829 3353  
[charity.bhengu@health.gov.za](mailto:charity.bhengu@health.gov.za) 083 679 7424