

South Africa COVID-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report 19 November 2021, Report 27

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

### TRENDS & ISSUES

- **Fear of vaccine side effects creates most hesitancy:** Fear of side effects from the vaccine is cited as the main reason why people are not going to vaccinate or return for their second dose of Pfizer vaccine. People sharing their experiences on social media to justify their decisions.
- **Fears over sexual dysfunction stop men vaccinating:** A new campaign #vacciNATION4MEN launched by the Community Constituency Front (CCF), aims to debunk the myth that vaccination can cause erectile dysfunction. In fact, Covid has been shown to cause erectile dysfunction, not the vaccine. South African men currently make up less than 40% of the vaccinated population. ([Here](#))
- **Social media conversations where pro-vax engage anti-vax people are increasingly being seen on social media.** With the increasing knowledge about vaccination, debates are becoming more prevalent. Pro-vaxers ask for claims of severe side effects to be supported with evidence.
- **Some confusion about the need to vaccinate children.** ([Here](#))
- **Public concerns around booster jabs.** People questioning if first vaccines were not efficacious or 'faulty' and worried about side effects ([Here](#)). Some vaccine skeptics have expressed concerns over the necessity and safety of booster shots. This has been exacerbated by mention of potential third and fourth booster shots ([Here](#)).

- **Concerns raised about Pfizer COVID-19 Pill** and need for the vaccine in the context of this. ([Here](#), [Here](#)).
- **Mixed messages from religious organisations:** Different religious organisations and leaders choosing to either support or dissuade against vaccination ([Here](#)) or promote vaccination ([Here](#), [Here](#)).
- **Some people who were vaccine hesitant are now more accepting of vaccines:** Many video clips and posts on social media about people who have changed their minds about vaccination after a serious illness or death of a family member from COVID-19. ([Here](#), [Here](#)).
- **Debate on mandatory mask wearing:** People are concerned about complacency and non-compliance with NPIs especially as the festive season approaches and threats of the fourth wave increase. Some insist that inspectorate officers be deployed for enforcement in public spaces ([Here](#))
- **Rush to secure vaccine certificates for festive travels:** Urgency regarding the downloading of certificates for citizens due to travel abroad as we approach the festive season. Incorrect/missing information/details on EVDS creating panic, as prevents people retrieving certificates or certificate, when issued, has wrong details. This is prompting large volumes of Call Centre calls.
- **Vaccine certificate scams.** Reports about certificates being sold which undermines the government's efforts and could affect international respect for South African vaccination certificates. KZN Premier has given a stern warning that the scammers will be prosecuted.
- **Government and partners putting great efforts to increase vaccination rate ahead of the projected Fourth Wave.** ([Here](#), [Here](#)). The second Vooma Vaccination Weekend happened 12 – 14 November.

## LOCAL / DISTRICT / PROVINCIAL ISSUES

This new section summarises social listening from areas around the country. For more information on reports from 13 health districts, see [here](#)

- **Ekurhuleni, Gauteng:** Recent positive trends observed with more older people and men, attending for vaccination, compared to younger people and women. This is an encouraging development. Heart inflammation from vaccine is cited as one of the main reason that people are afraid to vaccinate.
- **Garden Route, Western Cape:** Weekend Vooma is slowly making a difference with more children from 12 years up attending with their parents for vaccination. A decrease in the number of new Covid cases and in the demand for care beds at George Hospital have been experienced. People not well informed about the booster shots, thinking that the first dose did not work properly hence the need for boosters. There is also a decrease mask-wearing post vaccination. Community mobilisers have requested support with pamphlets.
- **Ehlanzeni, Mpumalanga:** High vaccine acceptance with people vaccinating before the festive season. However, vaccines administered in the past 7 days

dropped from 23,000 to 7,000 and the election is cited as one of the reasons for the drop.

- **Namaqua, Northern Cape:** The willingness amongst the 12-17-year-olds is quite surprising and impressive in comparison with the 18-year-olds and above. Vaccine uptake is high among this group because they want to have a safe festive season.
- **Bojanala, North West:** Vaccination numbers are increasing steadily. More workers eager to be vaccinated but more frustrated by not getting time off work to vaccinate,
- **King Cetshwayo, KZN:** High demand for vaccinations. More people asking about their turn for pop-up vaccination sites. Positive questions are being asked, which is a good sign that more people who were previously hesitant to vaccinate have become interested.
- **OR Tambo, Eastern Cape:** Concerned about the low vaccine uptake among young people who are more concerned about unemployment. Others reluctant because they are still not sure of vaccine safety and efficiency.
- **City of Johannesburg, Gauteng:** Concerns about non-compliance to public health protocols in churches, where physical distancing remains a challenge.
- **Khayelitsha, Western Cape:** Pop-up sites with loud music and DJ's attracted more people, especially the young in Bosasa. They were concerned about side effects and wanted facts.
- **Dr Ruth Segomotsing Mompati, North West:** More people are coming out for vaccination. Even those who were hesitant because of the misinformation now realise that what they hear in the street is different from what they experience.
- **Mangaung, Free State:** The turnout for Vooma vaccination weekend was good. The main issue is the long distances some people have to walk to the designated sites.
- **Buffalo City, Eastern Cape:** Fewer people came out for vaccination this week. Social mobilisers continue with education on Covid and vaccination using loud hailing, and door-to-door campaigns
- **Amathole, Eastern Cape:** Low vaccination uptake, and challenges in transport to the vaccination site.

## MISINFORMATION

- **MISINFO:** ~~13 children in South Africa dying from vaccine. A graphic footage of dead children used to scare.~~ **TRUTH:** A photo of children tragically killed has been shared – it is from Kenya and is used to mislead.
- **MISINFO:** ~~Covid vaccines aren't safe for children and they will die within two years.~~ **TRUTH:** Vaccines are safe for children and children above 12 should get vaccinated. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Covid vaccines cause blood clotting within 58 hours of being vaccinated.~~ **TRUTH:** There have been very rare cases of blood clots caused by the vaccine, but for the most part it is Covid itself that can cause blood clots. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Covid vaccines cause inflammation of the heart.~~ **TRUTH:** There have been a few cases where the heart of someone who has been vaccinated

has been inflamed, but the risk is very low and in most cases that have been reported the people had only mild symptoms and recovered quickly. 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 moms should get vaccinated as the risk of having COVID while pregnant poses far greater risks to the baby than side effects of vaccines, speak to your health care provider for specific concerns. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

## PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Build the capacity and make information, education and communication (IEC) materials available to community mobilisers to help them debunk rampant misinformation in the communities.
- Continue providing evidenced-based information with verified statistics on the risk of contracting the virus and having severe symptoms when not vaccinated.
- Continue providing information regarding vaccine safety and effectiveness. Need to create clear, consistent messaging about vaccine developments and communicate often.
- Emphasise hopeful messages highlighting vaccines being crucial for ending the pandemic and share solidarity messages on social and public health measures promoting safe behaviours.
- **Vax Champs:** The Vooma Vaccine Champions has now been launched. Protect your friends and family, help end the Covid pandemic, be a Vax Champ! This programme should be widely promoted and supported. The Vax Champs will be ambassadors for vaccination, sharing their testimonies and encouraging others to vaccinate.

## 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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