

South Africa Covid-19 & vaccines Social Listening Report 05 December 2022, Report 78

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This is a weekly report of the RCCE Social Listening and Infodemic Management team on COVID-19 vaccine and other health emergencies concerns, sentiments, rumours, and misinformation in South Africa. It provides an analysis of online and offline content. Thanks to all who contribute to this report each week.

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KEY TRENDS | COVID-19

Posts generating more traction. Online conversations that generated more traction were around “Covid-19: weekly rate of new cases drops by 9%, almost 600 people in hospital” ([Here](#)) “vaccine accessibility” ([Here](#)), also shared ([Here](#)); “vaccinated people mark up the majority of the vaccine deaths” ([Here](#)) and ([Here](#)); “no longer the pandemic of the unvaccinated” ([Here](#)) and ([Here](#)); “Covid-19 testing lab mistakes may have led to deaths of 20 people”. ([Here](#)); “saving countless lives by spreading the truth about the vaccine” ([Here](#)) and ([Here](#)); “Twitter has stopped enforcing its Covid-19 misinformation policy” ([Here](#)); “Covid blood-thinner drug treatment dangerous” ([Here](#)); “Covid-19 samples from HIV+ person over six months showed that the virus evolved to become more pathogenic” ([Here](#)); “Parents refuse use of vaccinated blood in life-saving surgery on baby” ([Here](#)); “You can finally buy Covid-19 home tests in South Africa – here’s what you need to know”. ([Here](#)) “16 Days of Activism” ([Here](#)) and “Viruses don’t wait, responding to the next pandemic must start now” ([Here](#))

Renewed interest in COVID-19 Stats. The COVID-19 weekly rate of 2 633 new cases ([Here](#)) showed a drop of 9.1% with Limpopo and Gauteng recording the highest new cases, and media claims of 592 hospital admissions ([Here](#)) from 9 044

active cases in the country. [\(Here\)](#) The sentiments included “Does this suggest the predicted wave is unlikely to occur?” [\(Here\)](#) “Now that December is here, they are starting.”, “dis mos somer en vakansie”, “It’s trying to die down but they trying to revive it”, “you are warning us of COVID, yet you open borders to tourists”, “start testing people especially at border posts before this thing become uncontrollable”; “trying to get us to vaaccinate before holidays”, “It’s all about controlling us and putting more money in their own pockets”, “I really can’t imagine going on lock down again”, “any weekly updates on other viruses and health issues out there like HIV, diabetes etc.” and “exactly, more people die in road accidents than of COVID”. [\(Here\)](#)

A total of 21 350 425 PCR tests were done as of 26 November 2022. This week’s PCR tests were 4,6% lower than the previous week, with 12,1% testing positive which did not significantly change from the previous week. [\(Here\)](#) The sentiments included “Can’t trust the PCR test sorry”, “PCR tests were all acts of criminality”, “COVID never existed in my world, no test, no mask, no sanitizing”. [\(Here\)](#)

Concerning COVID-19 boosters. Misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and boosters has spiked on social media since the booster dose campaign to get people to take additional doses as vaccine protection waned. Some people have dismissed the promotional messages as “propaganda”, “Still selling it hard”, “we don’t need your clot shot, we need jobs”, “aren’t you tired of this”, “there are no human trials for the booster dose, how then does it prevent illness”, “No ways, my arm is still painful can’t even lift it up”, “every day in pains since 2021 after this Covid 19 jabs”, “this is a killer shot, it does not save lives”, “we forgot about that thing of yours”, “has anyone seen someone with COVID in person?”, “I am 88, never had a jab and 3 years later still fine” and others advising people to take remedies; “stop vaccinating, treat yourself with honey, ginger, lemon and disprin in hot water.” and some still believe that “this plandemic is over, stop vaccinating” [\(Here\)](#), [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#) Some people were still eager to vaccinate. “Do you still have COVID vaccines available?” [\(Here\)](#)

Persistent claims about vaccines. A post on COVID-19 deaths was shared [\(Here\)](#) stating that “vaccinated people markup the majority of the vaccine deaths” and it claimed 58% vaccinated people had died from COVID-19 adding “this is no longer the pandemic of the unvaccinated, vaccinated people now make up the majority of COVID-19 death” [\(Here\)](#) The sentiments included “I’m sick of the lies”, “Refuse this poison”, “I stood my ground, No!”, “I refused vaccine at the cost of my job”, “COVID was brought in for profit”, “Their profits are down on Bivalent boosters”, “As vaccinated people increase, new variants are generated”, “We can no longer say these are deaths of the unvaccinated”, “being unvaccinated is high risk, but protection wanes, a dilemma; basically, you will die from vaccines, you will also die from being unvaccinated”. [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#) “These products have shown great toxicity, genotoxicity, they are poison”. [\(Here\)](#)

Conversations about vaccine accessibility. In May 2020 WHO proposed a COVID-Technology Access Pool (C-TAP), designed to share knowledge to rapidly scale up vaccine production but the vaccine companies refused to participate. Later, India and South Africa proposed the World Trade Organization’s waive of certain provisions of the trip’s agreement for the duration of the pandemic. Some countries have banded together to make mRNA vaccines locally on a project led by WHO.

However, in a series of tweets posted on vaccine accessibility under the #BigPharma, #Vaccineinequality, people showed great interest ([Here](#)) The sentiments expressed include the following:

“South Africa president tried to fight WHO to get Africa to produce its own COVID vaccine they never let him can’t you see the subtle technique? I like to hear what you think on this, was he also corrupt by trying?” ([Here](#)); “Remember COVID vaccine waivers? India and SA pushed hard so other countries could also produce the vaccines. Not much ever came out of it despite a raging global pandemic why? Lobbyists for global Pharma” ([Here](#)); “In a few months the #WHO hub in SA made an amazing breakthrough and reproduced Moderna’s Covid vaccine. Now their largest barriers are the same ones that have kept vaccine production in the hands of Big Pharma for decades” ([Here](#)); “Bill Gates funded the manufacturing & distribution of the AstraZeneca COVID vaccine through GAVI & CEPI, millions to the Serum Institute of India to manufacture the vaccine, & is funding the “safety and efficacy” studies of the AstraZeneca COVID vaccine in Brazil and South Africa” ([Here](#)); “COVAX was founded by Bill Gates and is co-led by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) set up in 1999 with seed money from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation” ([Here](#))”

Another view on South Africa’s dependency on wealthy nations, was “a radical plan could solve a historical global health inequality, countries in the global South who have waited for more than a year for ample supplies of COVID vaccines have banded together to make mRNA vaccines locally. If successful, they could end a dangerous dependency on wealthy nations and help stop pandemics before they start”. An article also highlighted that “In a special episode supported by the Pulitzer Centre, journalist Amy Maxman shares her reporting from Southern Africa about inspiring project led by WHO that’s made fast progress, “but it could fail, and a global imbalance will remain if Big Pharma has its way”. ([Here](#))”

KEY TRENDS | HIV/AIDS

Public interest in injectable PrEP. The SA Health Products Regulation Authority (Sahpra) is reviewing a monthly injectable pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) instead of a daily pill for HIV prevention. ([Here](#)) A high level of interest has been expressed in response to this media article. “So, you have to take it every time before sex. If I have sex seven times a week do, I then must take it each time or does it last for some time on the body before I must take another one”, “I was taking them, but they make me dizzy”, and “Our clinic doesn’t want to give us they day it is for people who are raped”. ([Here](#))

KEY TRENDS | MALARIA

Malaria becoming harder to end. It was reported that climate change affected the mosquito behaviour, making it harder to end Malaria in South Africa. ([Here](#)) An

insecticide-resistant mosquito from Mozambique, *Anopheles funestus*, has reinvade KwaZulu-Natal, driving malaria case numbers up. In Gauteng, a Malaria case numbers started rising when the COVID-19 travel restrictions were lifted in early 2022. Most of the malaria cases reported in Gauteng are due to infections acquired outside the borders of Gauteng. Travel clinics were established.

KEY TRENDS | MONKEYPOX

Low interest in monkeypox (mpox). Globally, monkeypox cases have dropped amid the vaccines, and in the U.S.A. mpox has been declared as “*no longer a public health threat*”. [\(Here\)](#) In South Africa, the number of mpox cases remain unchanged at five. There have been no new cases since August 2022. The last patients were successfully treated. [\(Here\)](#) Interest on social media has also declined. [\(Here\)](#) The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended new name for monkeypox disease, which is now mpox as of 28 November 2022 following a series of consultations with global experts. Both names will be used simultaneously for one year while monkeypox is phased out. [\(Here\)](#) When the outbreak of monkeypox expanded earlier this year, racist and stigmatizing language online and in some communities was observed and reported to WHO. [\(Here\)](#)

There are persistent concerns about the availability of treatment for mpox. “*I have been asking private hospitals and public clinics about the monkeypox vaccine and its availability in this country, and none of them have it. I have just returned from the USA and there are huge campaigns to vaccinate for monkeypox there. When is it likely to become available? Is it advisable to take the meningitis vaccine for monkeypox? I am a cautious but sexually active gay man.*” [\(Here\)](#)

KEY TRENDS | POLIO

In South Africa, no outbreak of Polio has been declared, but sporadic and unconfirmed cases were reported and discussed on social media. The conversation included “...it was eradicated many years ago but its back”, and “in northern KZN parts, polio is so prevalent that most homes have a polio sufferer.” [\(Here\)](#)

There were also claims that many children had not received their polio vaccines since the beginning of the year due to vaccine shortages in Bushbuck Ridge, Ehlanzeni district in Mpumalanga. “*Bushbuck Ridge has not had RCG and Polio vaccines since January this year. Some were sent to the local hospitals but there was only enough for 100 patients.*” [\(Here\)](#)

“*Some BCG and Polio vaccines have been out of stock on and off for many years now also in Limpopo. Why is it only news now*”, “*Even in 2018-2019, it was the same thing. Children were out of stock throughout the country and there was no COVID-19 then*” and “*can this government just try and do one thing, right?*” [\(Here\)](#)

KEY TRENDS | MEASLES

Increase in new cases. To date, 99 Measles cases – 77 in Limpopo and 22 in Mpumalanga – have been laboratory confirmed in the country as of 01 December 2022. A global report has linked the global measles outbreaks to the disruption of health services during the COVID-19 period. Approximately, 40 million children missed their measles vaccinations in 2021. ([Here](#)) There were about 9 million measles cases that year and 128,000 deaths from a highly contagious but preventable virus through vaccines, with 22 nations already reporting large outbreaks. Because of interruptions in vaccinations, “*measles is an imminent threat in every region of the world,*” ([Here](#))

Views divided on measles immunization. Social media misinformation about vaccines demonstrates the anti-vax sentiment that has spread from COVID to measles. The measles outbreak was attributed to parents who acknowledged stopping their children’s vaccinations during the pandemic because they thought the vaccines weren’t safe. Others expressed concern about how some private doctors were silent about children’s immunizations when presented with a child with measles. Some blamed the government for the measles outbreak saying it stopped

making it compulsory for parents to present childhood immunization certificates for admissions at creche, pre-school and primary school.

The sentiments included *“This is seriously madness where does this disease come from?”*, *“Nakhoke sebeqalile”*, *“It’s a joke, all over the world. They are killing people. A superior plan”*, *“How is this still OK?”* *“Thanks to people spreading fears and lies about vaccine”*. ([Here](#))

“Time to bring back the requirement of vaccination certificates before enrolling in school”, *“My child got it from his friend. Measles is here, are vaccines for Measles still available”*, *“Yes, they are available but not a requirement in public schools for years. Private schools still require it. They still care to protect the kids”*. ([Here](#))

“Measles is here”, *“It has started in our area in KZN. I went to a doctor and he didn’t tell me about vaccines”*, *“My kid was in the clinic yesterday, and got a referral letter to hospital”*, *“There is an outbreak of measles because people stopped vaccinating their children”*, *“People stopped vaccinating because of the lies and conceptions and misinformation spread about vaccines”*. ([Here](#))

“Do you even know how many people have died or have other underlying conditions now because of this safe and tested vaccine you had?”, *“before COVID you had no clue about vaccines now suddenly you are anti vaxxers are professional virologists”*, *“Tens of millions would be dead if it weren’t for vaccines, you ignorant fool. Now look at this outbreak”*, *“give us the figures”*. ([Here](#))

“Anti-vaxxers are starting again”, *“and it’s the children that suffer. Yet they are alive because their parents made sure that they had their vaccines and immunizations when they were babies”*, *“It’s sad”*, *“Those shots went through proper trials. Do your own research not through media”*, *“Khohlwani, hell big NO to vaccination”*, *“Says a guy who got all his shots as a kid”*. ([Here](#))

KEY TRENDS | EBOLA

Key misleading messages. People continue to spread misinformation online about the Ebola outbreak in Uganda. The key misleading messages which have been shared locally include *“the government is using it to justify locking down and controlling citizens”*, *“the outbreak is a cover to harvest body organs to sell illegally”*, *“the government is falsifying case numbers to attract funding or just to scare people”*. For example, a social media post claimed the UK’s Princess Anne, sister to King Charles, who visited that country in October highlighted the “lies” and “propaganda” about Ebola. It said there was no way she would have toured a country which had “real” cases of Ebola. ([Here](#))

MISINFORMATION

MISINFO: ~~Measles vaccine did not go through proper trials and unsafe. (Here)~~ **TRUTH** MMR vaccine is safe and effective. Two doses of MMR vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing *measles*; one dose is about 93% effective. An estimate 95% of children need to be vaccinated against *measles* to prevent outbreaks. [\(Here\)](#)

MISINFO: ~~Long covid is long term side effects of COVID vaccines.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim. Long covid is caused by COVID not covid vaccines. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: ~~A New variant of COVID Omicron BA2.75 is more infectious and deadly than the current Omicron 5 variant.~~ **TRUTH:** Only one case in July in South Africa, and not enough known about BA 2.75. Most cases in South Africa are Omicron 5. See [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 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: ~~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](#).

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 Viral Facts content responding to misinformation which can be used freely. You can find previous reports on the [AIRA page](#).

Key misinformation trends this week are:

- *Ebola vaccine trials to “depopulate Africa”* [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)
- *“I’d rather die from Ebola than abstain from sex”* [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)
- *Prayers can heal Ebola if you believe!* [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)
- *Ebola exists...but only in schools* [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)

PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Childhood immunization. The RCCE TWG must communicate clearly to the public the national efforts being made to eradicate measles and polio. Produce IEC material for general practitioners to encourage parents and caregivers to use the Children's Road-to-Health booklet to ensure that all children are up to date with their measles vaccinations. Click www.sidebyside.org.za for the booklet or [Index](#) for the latest updates.

Malaria transmission period. As malaria transmission increases, the RCCE TWG is working with Limpopo and relevant stakeholders including tourism and transport sectors. Travelers visiting malaria-endemic areas in South Africa and other SADC countries are cautioned to take precautionary measures.

COVID-19 boosters. As COVID-19 is not yet over, the RCCE TWG continues to promote the vaccination rollout, reinforce messages about the benefits of vaccines and booster shots to keep your immunity up, and to amplify social media content that debunks common claims about boosters. If you are not sure about your next vaccine or booster shot, contact [FindMyJab](#) to confirm the operational vaccination sites.

Adverse events. The RCCE TWG continues to educate the public about how to report adverse events after vaccination. The public is encouraged to contact the National Health Hotline 0800 029 999, use MedSafety App <https://medsafety.sahpra.org.za/> or email AEFI@health.gov.za to report adverse events.

METHODOLOGY AND COLLABORATION

The Social Listening & Infodemiology team that produces this report is part of the Risk Communications & Community Engagement (RCCE) Working Group of the Department of Health in South Africa. 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
- **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
- **Health Systems Trust, Community Constituency Front (CCF), HealthEnabled**
- **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, Deaf SA, SA National Council for the Blind, Treatment Action Campaign and Disability SA.

The data for this report was collected by the National Department of Health (NDOH), Health Systems Trust (HST), University of Free State, National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) and Real 411. The report was drafted by Charity Bhengu and reviewed by Nombulelo Leburu.

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