

South Africa COVID-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report 15 December 2021, Report 31

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This is a weekly report of COVID & vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Further info [Here](#). This is the last edition of the year, and we will start again in January 2021. The Infodemiology and social listening team wish you all a safe and happy holiday period. Please protect yourself, your friends and family by getting vaccinated, wearing a mask and physical distancing to stay as safe as we can.

KEY TRENDS

- **Online conversations about COVID-19 vaccine certificates and the Pfizer booster shots have increased.** Several conversations are circulating aimed at anti-establishment and anti-vaccine policy. [Here](#)
- **People arguing that an increase in COVID-19 cases driven by the Omicron variant is proof that vaccines do not work.** The same people are spreading misinformation, claiming; “a lack of vaccine protection puts the vaccinated population at more risk than the unvaccinated population”.
- **There has been an increase in vaccine related misinformation** perpetuating the negative side effects of the vaccine for all people. [Here](#).
- **An increase in people disagreeing with mandatory vaccine policies,** resulting in an increase in the number of people uniting against mandatory vaccine policies. [Here](#)
- **Official communication regarding the infections nature of the Omicron variant fuelling the fourth COVID-19 surge.** [Here](#). Thus far, there is an increase in infections, especially in the 30 to 50-year age group in COVID-19 cases, but severity needs to be established.
- **Hospital admissions are rapidly increasing amidst the Omicron surge.** National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD)’s sentinel

COVID-19 hospital system has reported an increase in hospital admissions, and an increase in hospital admissions of a younger demographic. [Here](#)

- **An increase in vaccinations as the Omicron variant spreads.** Especially in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, more people have been vaccinating due to fear of the Omicron variant. [Here](#)
- **An increase in the number of fake vaccine certificates.** Illegal activity to forge fake vaccine certificates has increased, as many more people who refuse to vaccinate want to gain the benefits vaccinated people have under the new policies. [Here](#)
- **Vaccine access has increased since undocumented people are eligible for the vaccine** in areas where this access was not previously difficult, like Hillbrow in Johannesburg. [Here](#)
- **There are many rumours that anti-vaccination behaviours are linked to political agendas** and that influential figure may be perpetuating the spread of misinformation. [Here](#)
- **Some Matric Rage events and end of year school gatherings have been cancelled**, while others are considered super spreading events. Parents are requested to discourage their children from participating in these celebrations where young people gather in large group that may flout COVID safety protocols and endanger lives. [Here](#)
- **Three issues have generated loud resistance on social media, but appear to have increased vaccine uptake:** (a) Vaccine mandates – lots of argument against but this has motivated some to vaccinate. (b) Omicron – many people vaccinating from fear of the new variant, but it is used as argument that vaccines don't work if there are new variants. (c) Fourth wave – there are arguments that vaccines can't work if many people are still getting it, but people's fear of the rising cases has led to more people vaccinating. In each of these three issues, there are noisy arguments about vaccination, and motivation to vaccinate, which is less discussed publicly.

LOCAL / DISTRICT / PROVINCIAL ISSUES

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

- **Mkhanyakude, KZN:** Individuals still question the efficacy of the vaccines; they believe they are still at a research phase linking this to claims that there are people who are experiencing adverse reaction/allergies after vaccination that are not listed or communicated as side effects. Others wanting to know if “this vaccine protect us against the new variant?” and “why are people taking booster shots if the vaccine is effective?”
- **Ekurhuleni, Gauteng:** The vaccine acceptance is increasing because people fear the 4th Young people, especially between the ages of 12 and 17, are coming forward to vaccinate together with their parents. The Vooma Weekend campaign started well with the school zone base vaccinations were on 30th November and 6th December 2021.

- **Bojanala, North West:** A group that is anti vaccine mandates circulating a video of the President saying there would be no forced vaccinations previously, in contrast to recent talks.
- **Cape Winelands:** Steady increase of vaccination numbers between 12-17 year olds supported by their parents in the farms. The farm community is concerned about the return of their relatives from the cities where there are more COVID-19 infections.
- **Harry Gwala, KZN:** Vaccine uptake is decreasing due to misinformation about the Vooma Vouchers and vaccination passports. People are questioning why government is coercing people with vouchers to vaccinate and the introduction of vaccination certificates when vaccination is voluntary.
- **Garden Route, Western Cape:** People are concerned about the influx of tourists during the festive season. It is reported that the vaccination process is slow because nurses were not willing to continue working long hours.
- **Namaqua, Northern Cape:** Vaccination is picking up after the announcement of an increase of the Vooma Vouchers from R100 to R200, which has been extended to over 50 year-olds
- **OR Tambo, Eastern Cape:** Parents want their children to vaccinate before they travel long distances for holidays, and some want to vaccinate because they are scared of the new variant and fourth wave and others because their relatives who work in the cities could bring the virus home.
- **Buffalo City, Eastern Cape:** An increase of vaccine uptake since the launch of vouchers and lucky draw prizes to get people to vaccinate.
- **City of Johannesburg, Gauteng:** Since the beginning of the school based vaccination programme, school learners have been coming in numbers for vaccination, with some of them accompanied by their parents.
- **Khayelitsha, Western Cape:** There is misinformation that most health workers are unvaccinated. These are trusted sources of information for many people whose action / inaction may cause wider vaccine hesitancy.
- **Namaqua, Northern Cape:** There is misinformation about Omicron and the fourth wave which has frustrated efforts to get people to vaccinate.

ISSUES RAISED FOR FOLLOW-UP:

- **Mkhanyakude, KZN:** Although information is available, it is often not easy to understand, resulting in a need for more COVID vaccine awareness and education.
- **Ekurhuleni, Gauteng:** People are reporting side effects that are not in the list. It is recommended that the official list of Covid-19 side effects must be reviewed and updated.
- **Bojanala, North West:** The youth also wants incentives for vaccination. Sub-districts community mobilisers recommend competitions to improve their work performance.
- **Cape Winelands, Western Cape:** The visibility of communication and radio slots should be increased to reinforce messages on NPIs and uptake of vaccines ahead of the festive season.
- **Harry Gwala, KZN:** It is necessary to communicate clear messages about the reason behind the introduction of vouchers and certificates.

- **Garden Route, Western Cape:** Nurses should be paid a decent rate for overtime to encourage them to work hard to ensure that most people are vaccinated by Christmas. This is a barrier to increased vaccination.
- **OT Tambo, Eastern Cape:** Community mobilisers face transport challenges to reach communities far from where they live and low on communication material supplies.
- **Buffalo City, Eastern Cape:** People complain about being forced to vaccinate to keep their jobs.
- **City of Johannesburg, Gauteng:** People are questioning why vaccination is now compulsory in the workplace. They require relevant communication material about vaccine mandates.
- **Khayelitsha, Western Cape:** More role models such as Vax Champs are needed in the area to counter the damage cause by vaccine hesitancy and rumours about health workers not vaccinating.

MISINFORMATION

- **MISINFO:** ~~The Omicron variant is caused by the vaccines.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support the idea that vaccines are responsible for new Covid variants. See [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Omicron was created as punishment to Africa for telling Pfizer not to deliver more vaccines.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim. South Africa did pause delivery as we had sufficient stock and lower vaccination rate. See [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Omicron was planned and intentionally released according to a time table.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim. Epidemiology and other medical science models can model the progress of infection in SA, which is unpacked [here](#). There is no human planning of variants or timing of the waves of infection, see [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines are a satanic plan and each has a barcode linked to 666 (the number of the beast).~~ **TRUTH:** Vaccines have been developed by scientists, and they have no link to any religion or religious text. There is no evidence to support this claim and vaccines are endorsed by several church groups, see [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Vaccine vouchers are part of plan to bribe people to take killer vaccine.~~ **TRUTH:** Vouchers are an incentive to people to get vaccinated. The plan is to vaccinate to help prevent death especially among people over 50 years old, the most vulnerable population. If you have been vaccinated you are less likely to get Covid, and if you do get Covid it's likely to be far less severe. See [here](#), [here](#) & [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines cause infertility in men and women and negatively impacts their sexual performance.~~ **TRUTH:** 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 to get vaccinated.~~ **TRUTH:** While vulnerable people may be fearful of interaction with state officials, anyone in South Africa can be vaccinated, regardless of nationality. See [here](#) and [here](#).

PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Continue communicating through influencers who are vaccinated or championing communication to the public as living testimonies for those still hesitant to vaccinate.
- Engage respectfully with communities in a tone and style that is conversational and less preaching at people; more talking and answering questions about their issues & concerns in plain language.
- Continue producing accurate with verified statistics on risks of contracting the virus and severe symptoms after vaccination for community mobilisers to help them debunk rampant misinformation in the communities
- Create clear, consistent messaging about vaccine developments and communicate often about what is known and unknown, and plans in place to investigate further scientific interventions and breakthroughs to manage new variants
- Emphasize hopeful messages highlighting vaccines are crucial for ending the pandemic and share solidarity messages around protective measures and safe behaviours
- Explain why the R100 voucher incentive, now increased to R200, seems to have the desired effect, because many unvaccinated people in the over 50 age group are inquiring whether it is true or just a hoax, and demonstrate through testimonies why people welcome it.
- Flood Social Media with messages that encourages outdoor social gatherings, and good ventilation (open windows) for good air circulation especially in confined spaces and for those travelling long distances in public transport.
- The target of 70% adults vaccinated in SA by Christmas will not happen, hence the need to emphasize the need for ventilation, small, outside gatherings – disseminate social media animations and videos on this regard towards the Christmas break and on the need to get vaccinated.
- New Variants: Clear communications are needed around new Covid variants. Widespread communications should flood out on new variants to reduce fear.
- Community training: More talks in communities are needed to provide accurate health information on Covid and vaccines – there still is a strong need for this.
- Vaccination for children – it's necessary to communicate clear guidelines at the national level on this topic, especially as guidelines have changed on a second Pfizer vaccination.
- Research is needed on whether vaccine mandates are likely to increase or decrease numbers vaccinating – is opposition to coercion more or less significant than the motivation to vaccinate?

Viral Facts (Produced by the WHO African Infodemic Response Alliance)

- Is Omicron manufactured? ([Viral Facts](#))
- Explaining Covid 4th wave ([Viral Facts](#))
- Vaccines and pregnancy ([Viral Facts](#))
- COVID does not exist ([Viral Facts](#))

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**
- **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, Section 27 and Disability SA

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