

## South Africa Covid-19 & vaccines Social Listening Report

### 07 November 2022, Report 74

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.

### KEY TRENDS | COVID-19

**Persistent question on whether COVID-19 vaccines cause stroke.** The development of safe and effective vaccines against COVID-19 remains the cornerstone of controlling the pandemic, but there are increasing reports of strokes resulting from COVID-19 vaccinations, including ischemic strokes, hemorrhagic strokes, and cerebral venous sinus thrombosis. ([Here](#))

The reports have been misrepresented and misunderstood, adding to the challenge of vaccine hesitancy. Facebook users were interested in knowing if the COVID-19 vaccines cause stroke. Their comments about the World Stroke Day 2022 poster also associated stroke with COVID-19 vaccine. ([Here](#)) *The sentiments included “people are getting strokes after the vax and that’s scary”, “facts are out there, you just won’t find it in mainstream media”. ([Here](#))*

**More questions about the booster vaccine roll out for under 55-year-olds?** There was interest in the rollout of COVID-19 booster shots for people under 55 years old on social media. *“When are booster shots getting rolled out for people under 55 years? I was told that I don’t qualify. I last got a booster shot in April 2022”, “Question; are we supposed to get a second booster (so a 4<sup>th</sup> vaccine on Pfizer?)”, “My husband and I who both are well over 60 had our second boosters (4<sup>th</sup> Pfizer) in July” ([Here](#)) Those who were up to date with their boosters encourage others to protect themselves against the new variants. “Yes, if the booster is available to you take it. New variants will come, particularly if you or someone you care about is more vulnerable”. ([Here](#))*

**Steady increase of COVID-19 cases.** Health experts have warned of a spike in COVID-19 cases in four provinces as we approach the festive season. ([Here](#)) The media headlines have suggested that a new wave of the pandemic was looming, adding that *“people are getting infected in growing numbers and the disease is still killing people.” ([Here](#))*

There were 2 107 new COVID-19 cases with 52 deaths reported in South Africa on 02 November 2022. However, people were sceptical about the COVID-19 updates ([Here](#)), and quoting an academic article ([Here](#)), they claimed that the PCR testing was flawed, *“which meant COVID-19 vaccine outcomes rate data are unreliable and invalid”*.

The sentiments were *“the lockdown looming”, “I’m sure its higher than those numbers, the new strain is so mild so hardly anyone test for covid and hospitalisation over the last 6 months has been low”, “we will overcome”. ([Here](#))* Others were very negative *“stop spreading lies”, “lies to push their genocidal poison”, “your propaganda is outdated now”, “we are not falling for this again” and “nobody cares about this nonsense anymore”. ([Here](#))*

The Department appeals to those who are *“unvaccinated or partially vaccinated, to protect themselves against this life-threatening disease with vaccines”. ([Here](#))* Contact the National Health Hotline 0800 029 999 if you have questions about vaccination.

**Call volumes about COVID-19 vaccines.** There has been a further decrease in call volumes for all tiers at the National Health Hotline centre. The reduced number of private sites offering vaccinations has been a focus of concern for people who continue to call in for alternative sites offering vaccinations. Others call to request assistance with obtaining their vaccination code for the purposes of downloading their vaccination certificate, or to correct personal information like names and mobile numbers are the main email queries. Vaccine record update and information edits. Vaccine certificates make up most of all queries which require additional escalation to resolve them.

**Interest in COVID-10 vaccines.** Three hundred and eighty-two calls were received regarding health care, vaccination results, vaccine inquiries, and people reporting feeling unwell. Others inquired about testing for travel purposes. Some were interested in knowing about the next wave of infections, and whether the symptoms would be different from previous waves and if they needed to isolate or quarantine. There were also calls regarding minor health concerns such as headaches, nausea, and swelling around the injection site resulting from post-vaccine symptoms.

**Vaccine deaths estimates false.** A recent study estimated COVID-19 jabs prevented almost 20 million global deaths, but vaccine sceptics have flipped the figure – falsely claiming 20 million people died from the vaccines. This false claim was circulated by the AAP FactCheck which has been accused of spreading disinformation. “The claim is baseless and does not stand up to mathematical scrutiny.” [\(Here\)](#)

## KEY TRENDS | MEASLES

**Measles cases are on the rise.** The number of measles laboratory-confirmed cases has increased in new districts. As of 03 November 2022, [\(Here\)](#), 25 cases have been recorded between the ages of 8 months and 42 years (16 Sekhukhune, 7 Mopani, and 2 Vhembe district). No deaths have been reported. The previously two admitted children have been discharged. Seven children were fully vaccinated with two measles doses, 5 children were not fully vaccinated, 3 unvaccinated, 4 unknown vaccination history, and 4 under investigation. Social media users have expressed concerns. “*One patient was hospitalized, another developed pneumonia*” [\(Here\)](#) “*We’ve never seen such a number of unimmunised children that we’re seeing now*” [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)

A “catch up” campaign to ensure that children are up to date with their measles vaccinations has been launched in Sekhukhune district. “*thanks to parents who brought their children in numbers. You must negotiate with them first before they allow you to touch their arms, you must convince them why you show them love by hurting them.*” [\(Here\)](#) The experts have called for increased access to vaccinations [\(Here\)](#)

The sentiments included “*the country was struggling to achieve 95% coverage required for herd immunity before the pandemic*” [\(Here\)](#) and the “*Department of health had done little to communicate the benefits of vaccination for measles to the public*” during the pandemic, which they described as “*signs of a failing primary healthcare system*” [\(Here\)](#) and “*sadly, the terrible decisions, during Covid, they should never have paused the childhood vaccination schedule*” [\(Here\)](#)

Other sentiments included “*Are you testing in Northern Cape Upington as well. Looks like an outbreak there. I was in contact with 3 people who had it. Two adults and 1 child*”, “*Measles has been with us for long. In the 80s if one of the kids in class got it, others also caught it. Nothing new*”, “*You realize some kids die from it right? But hey, it was cool in the 80’s so let’s just leave it at that*” and “*Some kids die from it*”. [\(Here\)](#)

## KEY TRENDS | EBOLA

**Ongoing queries on Ebola.** One query was received regarding the Uganda Ebola outbreak. The individual sought information regarding the procedures to be followed when returning from Uganda. The individual was informed that no tests would be performed on them unless they present symptoms of the virus. “*A colleague and I are traveling back to Uganda in a few days. There has currently been an outbreak of Ebola and I wanted to ask if you think we should be tested or not. We have not been in contact with anyone who has been confirmed with the disease, however we do not want to risk anything upon returning home.*” [\(Here\)](#)

## KEY TRENDS | TB

**COVID blamed for rising TB cases.** The number of people infected with tuberculosis, including drug-resistant TB, rose 4.5% in 2021 from 2020's figures — for the "first time in years", according to TB Alliance. [\(Here\)](#) More than a decade of progress was lost when COVID-19 emerged in 2020. [\(Here\)](#) The number of deaths also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic [\(Here\)](#) People continue blaming the government for neglecting other diseases during the pandemic. Governments continue to be blamed for neglecting other diseases during the pandemic. The National TB recovery plan is already in place to find the patients who were lost during the pandemic.

## KEY TRENDS | TYPHOID

**Fake news about typhoid.** The rumours which have been circulating among residents about a typhoid fever outbreak in Gauteng, were dismissed as fake news by the City of Tshwane. [\(Here\)](#) The sentiments were "So glad I can still count on truthful media!" and "There is nothing BUT FAKE NEWS". [\(Here\)](#)

An old WhatsApp warning people to "kook asseblief julle water" was also being circulated in the Western Cape because of the fake news about Typhoid. NICD also received a query regarding a newspaper article stating, "64 cases have been reported in the Western Cape". An individual called to verify the claim. "Are you aware of any Typhoid cases in the Western Cape?"

## KEY TRENDS | MONKEYPOX

**Downward global trend.** There has been a downward trend in cases noted since August of this year, partially due to the decline in cases noted in America and Europe, but overall, the global risks assessment remains moderate. The monkeypox cases in South Africa remain unchanged at a total of five cases to date.

## MISINFORMATION

**MISINFO:** ~~Moderna COVID vaccine causes diabetes type 1 in children.~~ **TRUTH:** There was 1 recorded case of a child becoming type 1 diabetic after vaccine, but diabetes was prominent in the family. Vaccines remain safe and effective in children. See [here](#), [here](#) and [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](#).

**MISINFO:** ~~People who have been vaccinated are more likely to get seriously ill from COVID.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim. People who have been vaccinated far less likely to experience severe symptoms. 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 Viral Facts content responding to misinformation which can be used freely. You can find previous reports on the [AIRA page](#).

### The key trends this week included:

- *Say no to Lockdown, No Ebola in Uganda* ([Here](#))
- *Ebola targets pupils at school in Uganda* ([Here](#))
- *Nigerian Refugees brought Cholera into Cameroon* ([Here](#))

### Persistent Rumours

~~COVID-19 is over~~ What can RCCE do? Highlight the vaccine's ability to mitigate severe symptoms and complications from contracting the disease without inoculation, and how it can protect individuals from new strains of COVID that may become prevalent. [[LINK](#)], and [[LINK](#)]

~~Fear of vaccine side effects/ long-term effects continue to be misinterpreted or overstated~~ What to do? Continue to address COVID-19 side effects with updated material that is relevant to the specific concerns. Provide clarity of the findings of the [study](#). Continue to provide verified accurate information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine with updated information around the usefulness of booster doses.

~~Vaccines contain mRNA which is leading to an increase in monkeypox~~ What can RCCE do? Consistently promote accurate information regarding monkeypox symptoms, transmission, and mitigation methods as communities have expressed confusion about the disease. ([Here](#)) and utilize social science research to determine community-specific barriers and enablers for responses to the monkeypox outbreak to enable tailoring of RCCE and other interventions. ([Here](#)) and ([Here](#))

## PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**COVID-19 boosters.** As COVID-19 is not yet over, the RCCE TWG continues to promote the vaccination rollout and to reinforce messages about the benefits of vaccines and booster shots to keep your immunity up. If you are not sure about your next vaccine or booster shot, contact the National Health Hotline 0800 029 999 for assistance and [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 to advice on the next possible action to take to prevent complications. 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](mailto:AEFI@health.gov.za) to report adverse events.

**Measles outbreak.** The RCCE TWG is supporting the provincial “catch up” efforts, especially the Limpopo provinces where measles cases continue to increase, with the production of IEC material, social mobilization and community engagement and feedback to ensure that all targeted ages groups are up to date with their measles shots. The Children’s Road-to-Health booklets to ensure measles vaccinations are up to date can be found on [www.sidebyside.org.za](http://www.sidebyside.org.za). or click [Index](#) for the latest measles facts and updates

## 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
- **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 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 drafting team this week includes Charity Bhengu (NDOH), Herkulaas Combrink (UFS) and William Bird (Real 411). The data for this report was collected by the National Department of Health (NDOH), National Health Hotline, Health Systems Trust (HST), National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) and Real 411. The report has been reviewed by Nombulelo Leburu (NDOH).*

### Contact:

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

<a href="mailto:nombulelo.leburu@health.gov.za">nombulelo.leburu@health.gov.za</a>	082 444 9503
<a href="mailto:peter@healthenabled.org">peter@healthenabled.org</a>	082 829 3353
<a href="mailto:charity.bhengu@health.gov.za">charity.bhengu@health.gov.za</a>	083 679 7424