

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

### 21 November 2022, Report 76

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

**Projections of new waves dismissed as fear mongering.** The global Covid-19 infections will increase from the current average of 16.7 million cases to roughly 18.7 million by February 2023, driven by winter months in the northern hemisphere. [\(Here\)](#) South Africa is experiencing a steady rise in the COVID-19 cases with 2 938 new cases and 24 deaths as of 16/11/2022. [\(Here\)](#)

*“There are still acute COVID-19 cases in the ICU at Chris Hani, and it has never been closed. We are no longer in a panic mode, but COVID-19 is still here,”* Wits Prof Rudo Mathivha and Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) member. However, these projections and hospital admission reports due to COVID-19 have been dismissed as fear mongering and others just “do not care”. [\(Here\)](#).

There were also reports that *“COVID-19 vaccine drive is running out of steam. At its peak, South Africa was vaccinating about 240 000 people a day, which has dropped to about 5 000 and most vaccinating sites have closed”*. [\(Here\)](#) Others still do not believe that COVID-19 still exist [\(Here\)](#), *“The department is just creating drama”* [\(Here\)](#) The experts were talking about *“ending Covid-19 without exacerbating socio-economic burdens or putting the most vulnerable at greater risk”*. [\(Here\)](#)

There were reports that repeat infection seemed to be riskier than the first one. Re-infection was frequently brought up as being dangerous than the initial infection. People were encouraged to take boosters to prevent the risk of death, hospitalization, and serious complications. *“The risk of both acute and long COVID-19 increases with reinfection compared with a first bout with the virus, regardless of vaccination status. This was evident in unvaccinated, vaccinated and boosted people.”* [\(Here\)](#)

**Themes generating most interest.** This week’s themes included “claims about Pfizer”, “booster COVID-19 doses”, “COVID-19 no longer exists”, “vaccine mandates”, “vaccine hesitancy”, “anti-vaccination”, “shedding of COVID-19” and “effects of the pandemic on health workers, women, and children”. [\(Here\)](#), [\(Here\)](#), [\(Here\)](#) The top performing posts were *“strategies for malaria vaccination during the Covid-19 pandemic,”* [\(Here\)](#), *“COVID can be a devastating disease to the unvaccinated, and we know that vaccines are safe and they work,”* [\(Here\)](#) and *“a call for digital giants to implement measures taken on the COVID-19 pandemic to address false climate information spread”*. [\(Here\)](#), [\(Here\)](#) and [\(Here\)](#)

**Misinformation about booster doses.** The question of whether “the booster shots came from the same supply whose expiration date was extended” attracted attention. *“You change the expiry date of expired vaccines, no one wants it.”* [\(Here\)](#) Others questioned the safety of those vaccinations, were hesitant to use “expired vaccines,” and others questioned why they were offered the same vaccines as booster shots. [\(Here\)](#) and believed that “vaccines do not work”. [\(Here\)](#)

*“This hoax has gone too far.”* [\(Here\)](#) *“So glad I did not fall for this hoax! My body, my choice!!”* [\(Here\)](#) *“Won’t take one of these killer shots. It is bad enough to live with a husband who took 2 Pfizers.”* [\(Here\)](#) *“I would rather stay unpoisoned. Thank you.”* [\(Here\)](#) *“Your propaganda has failed. I fortified my immune system by having the infection.”* [\(Here\)](#) *“I have two precious friends who are virtually paralysed since getting their*

boosters” [\(Here\)](#) “The more you jab the more variants you get.” [\(Here\)](#) “COVID vaccination is causing mass depopulation, Infertility, cancer & immune system degradation.” [\(Here\)](#) “I suffer from long COVID.” [\(Here\)](#)

The news of the “updated booster shots targeting the highly infectious Omicron variant” which have been formulated to “better protect against the most recently circulating COVID-19 variants”, sparked curiosity. [\(Here\)](#) Others believed the three lessons learned from the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) pandemic, which included *anticipation of health inequalities, engagement in multidisciplinary efforts, and creating an environment to support effective behavioral changes*, must be considered to combat COVID-19. [\(Here\)](#)

Other sentiments included “I was vaccinated at KwaDabeka clinic now I can’t eat, I can’t wash my hands, I feel pain, I can’t even sleep,” [\(Here\)](#) “Our best friend died two weeks after his first Pfizer vaccine. It is more than a year and we can’t accept his death because he was a healthy person.” [\(Here\)](#) There have also been claims that the booster shots reduce one’s immune system. “Medical data shows that with each COVID-19 booster your immune system is pushed lower which means you can’t fight diseases anymore.” [\(Here\)](#) “I have had ongoing health issues. ECG showed nothing. Is it safe to get a second booster shot?” [\(Here\)](#)

They also believed that “the jabs don’t work and does far more harm than good” [\(Here\)](#) and “people no longer believe in you since you were silent when people fell sick and died” and refuse to take “killer vaccines”. [\(Here\)](#) Others defended the vaccines. “No one ever said that no one can’t have a negative effect incl death from the vaccine. People who is allergic to aspirin can die when they take it. [\(Here\)](#) “People died of this so called Covid and vaccine save lives... Well since covid started I was never sick never got infected and didn’t take the vaccine and I walked without a mask for the whole of the so-called pandemic.” [\(Here\)](#)

**Persistent claims about Pfizer.** Ongoing conversations about the ENCA’s report that “Pfizer admitted to not testing its Covid-19 vaccine before its release in December 2020” which has been described as “misleading” by AFP [\(Here\)](#) AFP Fact Check found the information was misinterpretation of remarks made by a Pfizer executive during a recent European Parliament hearing. “The point about transmission was misconstrued on social media and by eNCA.” [\(Here\)](#)

According to an article on the need of digital information literacy, “poor-quality and inaccurate internet material may hijack people’s attention, frequently by arousing curiosity, outrage, or anger.” [\(Here\)](#) It also highlighted how Google ads encouraged misinformation through “automated digital ad from major brands on global websites that spread false claims on vaccines, Covid-19, climate change, and elections”. [\(Here\)](#)

After a claim about a child’s long illness that was connected to the grandparents and parents who had previously contracted COVID-19, there were assertions regarding the shedding of COVID-19. [\(Here\)](#) “Can somebody give me a clear answer why my grandson in Grade 5 had to go to emergency twice this year? He is not jabbed but with headaches. I concluded that it is shedding from the grandparents and parents.” [\(Here\)](#)

The sentiments supporting this claim included “yes, unfortunately people won’t believe it and think conspiracy theories but when I was surrounded by a close friend, same thing headaches, headaches and my hormones stuffed, skin stuffed within hours of being around them. Breakouts glands also inflamed but no I’m a conspiracy theorist.” [\(Here\)](#) “Shedding is taking place if you believe it or not my grandson was 2 times this year in hospital with heavy headaches.” [\(Here\)](#)

**Further reduction in call volumes.** As interest in COVID-19 vaccines declined, the call volumes at the National Call Centre also decreased. The top calls for this week were about general COVID-19 questions as well as information around the isolation/quarantine period, travelling information, guidance around symptoms of Covid-19.

The availability of vaccination sites remained a concern for citizens who had been unsuccessful when visiting facilities for vaccinations. Agents directed these callers to the FindMyJab App and assisted with directing them to their nearest site.

Callers enquired about the Vaxi taxi initiative run by the Western Cape’s Emergency Medical Services (EMS). The service was relaunched in August and providing vaccination services using 2 ambulances. People were provided with their scheduled dates.

There were also queries about undocumented citizens requiring information about where and how to get vaccinated. One caller expressed concern that her ID number was used to register vaccination doses of an unknown person at a facility level.

This past week also saw an uptake of calls about booster shots and immunocompromised doses. Callers continued to request edits to personal information which directly aligned with the need to download new and updated vaccination certificates.

## 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 | MEASLES

The outbreak remains a great concern for the country as it can result to fatalities. However, confidence in vaccines has declined in the country since the start of the COVID pandemic. There were 60 measles cases including two new cases in Limpopo confirmed on 21 November 2022, with increasing reports of sporadic and unconfirmed cases in KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and Western Cape.

### Affected districts in Limpopo

Capricorn	Mopani	Sekhukhune	Vhembe	Waterberg
4	24	26	2	4

### Persistent claims about measles.

The Limpopo measles catch-up campaign continues to ensure that children are up to date with their measles vaccinations. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to ensure that their children are up to date with their measles vaccinations.

Others continued to be critical of the government, saying it had done little during the COVID-19 pandemic to address the vaccine shortages for childhood immunization. *“Limpopo ran short of the children’s measles vaccine in January last year”*. [\(Here\)](#) *“It’s true we couldn’t find the 10 weeks vaccination from 4 clinic in Limpopo”*, *“Very true even myself my son was not vaccination bcoz of that”*. [\(Here\)](#) Others were keen to know more about the plans to eradicate measles, *“...so what is the plan now?”* [\(Here\)](#) Some remained sceptical about vaccines, *“...promoting their needles again”* [\(Here\)](#)

## 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 | MONKEYPOX

**Persistent interest on availability of monkeypox vaccine.** The NICD continues to receive questions about monkeypox vaccine availability and whether meningitis vaccine could be used to treat monkeypox. “*I have been contacting private hospitals and public clinics regarding the monkeypox vaccine and its availability in RSA, 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.*” The monkeypox cases in RSA remain unchanged at a total of five cases to date. RSA received the all-clear for monkeypox after the last patients were successfully treated. ([Here](#))

## MISINFORMATION

**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 BA.2.75 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. Parents and caregivers are encouraged 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](http://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 [FindMyJob](#) 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](mailto: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
- **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 data for this report was collected by the National Department of Health (NDOH), Health Systems Trust (HST), National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD, National Health Hotline and Real 411. The report was drafted and reviewed by Charity Bhengu and Nombulelo Leburu (NDOH).*

### 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)  
[peter@healthenabled.org](mailto:peter@healthenabled.org)  
[charity.bhengu@health.gov.za](mailto:charity.bhengu@health.gov.za)

082 444 9503  
082 829 3353  
083 679 7424