

South Africa Covid-19 & Vaccine Social Listening Report

4 July 2022, Report 56

This is a weekly report of Covid-19 & vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Further information that provides the background to this report is available [here](#).

KEY TRENDS

Covid vaccines save 20 million lives. There has been favourable online discussion of the study published in The Lancet showing that vaccines saved an estimated 19.8 million lives from Covid-19. This is the best evidence available that the vaccines work. It also shows that vaccine inequity killed millions of people when vaccines were not accessible in poorer countries, especially in Africa ([Here](#)).

Second monkeypox case in SA. News that South Africa's second monkeypox case was traced to a 32-year-old man from Cape Town is still trending on digital media ([Here](#)). Some said they were "*not phased*" because they saw this as "another case of fear-mongering" to get them to accept "*pox vaccine*". Other sentiments were "*the amount of response this post is getting should tell you that people are not phased*" and "*we all know how this will end; masks away, pox vaccine or no traveling blah blah blah*" ([Here](#)) and calls for calm dismissed as "*crap*" ([Here](#)). On several engagements with the NICD on social media, people requested for monkeypox reports, information, root cause analysis and the information to be shared on a regular basis. Others meet the monkeypox narrative claiming that it is "*propaganda*" and "*another distraction*". There were claims that Covid-19 and monkeypox management are the same ([Here](#)).

Monkeypox vaccine inequality and hesitancy are similar for Covid-19. There are no specific vaccines for monkeypox, but smallpox jabs protect against the virus ([Here](#)). Wealthier countries already appear to have surplus smallpox vaccine while most African countries do not even have enough test kits, WHO Africa warned. "*What happened in the early days of the Covid-19 vaccine rollout when Africa watched on the sidelines as other countries snapped up limited supplies must not be allowed to recur*" ([Here](#)). Of the 282 reactions to the news article, there were 215 comments with similar attitudes against Covid-19 vaccines, "*Ai, here we go again*", and "*expect the vaccine hesitancy*". Others assumed monkeypox, smallpox, and chickenpox were all the same and can be treated in the same way. "*Yoh, but chicken pox is treated with Calamine lotion mos*" and "*you can cure monkeypox by steaming with gumtree leaves*" ([Here](#)).

Scepticism surrounding the governments' reaction toward monkeypox. As the government attempt to refute claims of another lockdown to contain spread of monkeypox saying there would be no need to impose regulations for monkeypox ([Here](#)), some people were sceptical saying "*the same thing happened with Covid-19. One minute we shouldn't panic, next minute we get a hard lockdown*" and accused the government of being "*useless in preparing for the worst*" ([Here](#)). Others agreed with the government, saying "*this too shall pass soon*" ([Here](#)). Calls for calm by government were dismissed as "*crap*" ([Here](#)) by some denialists who claimed that there was nothing to panic about and also asked "*why would you constantly talk about panic*".

Growing concern about the lifting of mask mandates. A group consisting of over 6,000 healthcare professionals described the government’s “*decision to drop compulsory wearing of mask*” as “*premature*” ([Here](#)). The Solidarity Doctors Network said they were “*seeing the highest number of patients with upper respiratory tract infections in comparison to the last two years.*” ([Here](#)) While most people have welcomed the end of the country’s mask mandate and very few still wear masks in public, others said “*they’ll continue to mask up*” and agreed that “*the decision was ill-advised*” and that it was “*an accessory that everyone had to get used to*” ([Here](#)).

Vaccine demand. Lifting Covid regulations has led to fewer people vaccinating – only 20,000 in the past week ([Here](#)). However, door-to-door vaccine promotion still works. It’s been successfully done in Gauteng informal settlements and rural Eastern Cape, but it’s labour intensive.

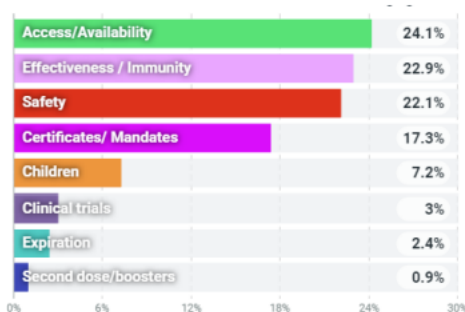
Impact of Covid-19 on women and children. In SA there is concern on the impact of the pandemic on children. An annual household survey concluded the impact that fewer children attended grade R than prior to the pandemic ([Here](#)). With the rise of Covid-19 infections in children, the US FDA granted emergency authorisation ([Here](#)).

Covid-19 vaccine Pfizer and US government deal seen as redundant. News focus on Pfizer and US government deal for more Covid-19 doses was seen as pointless information by some people who said they have so many crisis in the country and struggling with loadshedding and that it is also a waste of money “*when people are not vaccinating and would also expire*” due to low uptake ([Here](#)).

Increase in Covid-19 vaccine information related to travel and employment. Interest in the following search queries was rising on Google over the past week: “*Covid regulations South Africa*” (250% compared to the previous week), “*How many people have been vaccinated in South Africa?*” (+250%), “*Can my employer force me to get vaccinated?*” (+150%), “*Do I need to be vaccinated to travel?*” (+120%) ([Here](#), [Here](#)). Tweets about Covid vaccines in the country generated 14,000 engagements (+210% compared to last week).

Increased engagement of Covid-19 vaccine conversation on digital news media. News articles about Covid vaccines generated over 15,000 engagements (+70% compared to previous week). Top articles on digital news media by engagement include about monkeypox ([Here](#)), how vaccines save lives ([Here](#)), lifting mask mandates ([Here](#), [Here](#)), and mask mandates at work ([Here](#)).

Share of engagement by vaccine subtopic, Twitter, digital news and selected Facebook channels, South Africa



The Infosecurity conference ([Here](#)) highlighted that floods of email and social media makes it even harder to discern facts, particularly with synchronised campaigns. TikTok in particular is becoming more influential as platform for mis- and dis information.

MISINFORMATION

~~**MISINFO:** Now that Covid regulations been dropped there is no need to get vaccinated.~~

TRUTH: With the Covid regulations ending, vaccination is even more important. Covid-19 is still widespread and killing people every day. Vaccination is the main way to protect yourself and your family. It's still recommended to wear masks in indoor public spaces and to ventilate rooms. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** People who have been vaccinated are more likely to get seriously ill from Covid-19.~~

TRUTH: The evidence does not support this claim. People who have been vaccinated are far less likely to experience severe symptoms. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Covid-19 vaccines are not safe for children.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim. Different countries' medical regulatory authorities have approved Covid vaccines for different age groups – in SA the SA Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) has approved the vaccine for anyone 12 years and older. Vaccines have been found to be safe for children. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Monkeypox is just the new Covid-19 scam to control and or kill us OR monkeypox is the scam name for the side effects of the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine.~~ **TRUTH:** Monkeypox is a viral disease and not an auto-immune disease, so it cannot be a side effect of a vaccine and ~~**MISINFO:** Garlic, sage and essential oils are better at prevention and curing Covid-19 than vaccines.~~ **TRUTH:** While it can be good to use natural substances that are proven to improve your immune system for your general health, there is no evidence to support claims that they prevent getting Covid-19 or curing it. However, some people do use essential oils and garlic to regain smell after having Covid-19. See [here](#) and [here](#). Covid vaccines do not have any live virus in them. See [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Monkey pox only impacts gay people.~~ **TRUTH:** This is wrong. Most cases of monkeypox are not among the LGBT+ community. We must be careful of creating stigma, especially when there isn't evidence to support the claim. Similar false rumours were damaging at the start of the AIDS epidemic. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** "You have participated in a Covid test and you will get paid (if you do something)", sent in a text to your phone.~~ **TRUTH:** These messages are scams. Participation in any legitimate clinical trial in South Africa requires informed consent, and any payments have to be approved by an ethics committee and will usually only cover transport. See [here](#) for all the policies followed locally and [here](#) for an explanation of informed consent.

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines have a tracker chip to track your movements.~~ **TRUTH:** This is wrong; it's a scare conspiracy theory with no truth. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Ivermectin is an effective treatment for Covid-19.~~ **TRUTH:** The SA Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) carried out a study into the use of Ivermectin and concluded that "there is currently no credible evidence to support a therapeutic role for Ivermectin in Covid-19". They therefore ended the trial early. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines side effects are being under reported and can kill you. The SA Adverse reactions site shows how many have died!~~ **TRUTH:** This is false. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). SA has excellent adverse event reporting mechanisms backed by evidence (see [here](#) for a credible local site on adverse reactions). The SA Health Products Regulatory Authority has conducted research and found that no one in SA has died due to Covid-19 vaccines ([Here](#)).

MISINFO: I have survived four waves of Covid-19 already so I don't need a vaccine now to survive a fifth one. **TRUTH:** Getting vaccinated helps you reduce your chance of getting Covid-19 which is still highly contagious, it reduces the spread of Covid-19 to others, and also helps to reduce the risk of new variants emerging. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Covid-19 isn't that bad, so we don't need to be vaccinated. **TRUTH:** While some people who get Covid-19 can show no symptoms, vaccines are highly effective in preventing serious illness and hospitalisation. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Vaccines cause infertility and erectile dysfunction. **TRUTH:** There's no evidence to support these claims. Covid-19 however can impair sexual performance. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Covid-19 booster vaccines are dangerous. **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim. The Covid-19 booster vaccines are the same drugs used in the previous injections. Giving booster shots is normal practice. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Vaccines are dangerous and now linked to "vaccine-acquired immunodeficiency syndrome" or "VAIDS". **TRUTH:** No evidence at all to support the claim of immunodeficiency being related to Covid-19 vaccines. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Pfizer's own data shows over 1,291 side effects of the covid vaccine. **TRUTH:** A report from 2021 did have a long list of potential side effects, but these were NOT side effects of their Covid-19 vaccine. It was a list of potential side effects that the safety study was watching out for. The vaccine is safe and side effects are mostly mild. 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 the Viral Facts content responding to misinformation which can be used freely. Here are the latest [Viral Facts Africa](#) resources (please use them):

Key concerning Covid-19 Trends and Viral Facts

- Monkeypox is COVID Vaccine-Induced Shingles
- Only Countries Receiving Pfizer Vaccines have Monkeypox
- Children are More Susceptible to Vaccine Side Effects

Viral Facts Africa productions:

EXPLAINER: COVID & FLU ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))

DEBUNK: COVID VACCINES CAUSE AIDS ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))

DEBUNK: COVID VACCINES CAUSE MONKEYPOX ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))

MISINFORMATION LITERACY: ANATOMY OF A FALSE CLAIM ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))

Content from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI): [here](#)

Viral Facts Africa campaign to counter vaccine hesitancy with UK Government: ([Here](#))

Link to overview of materials produced [Here](#)

PROPOSED ACTION FOR RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Vaccination still matters. With the lifting of regulations for limiting the spread of Covid-19 and the ending of vaccine mandates in many organisations, vaccination is now the primary way to reduce infection. Covid-19 is still widespread and killing people, and other countries are experiencing new surges of Covid-19. Communication must emphasise this.

Door-to-door vaccination works. Organisations should be encouraged to run door-to-door vaccination promotion, which is still effective in getting more people to vaccinate, such as the ADAPT programme.

Covid-19 still more of a threat than monkeypox. Alarm about monkeypox is unnecessarily high, and is driven by international social media scare stories with few cases in SA. It should be stressed that Covid-19 is still a threat in SA and we know how to limit its spread.

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-19 contact centre:** 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-19 Comms:** a network of communications specialists producing information on the pandemic
- **DOH Free State & KZN:** Provincial Departments of Health
- **Community Constituency Front (CCF), Covid-19 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 RESOURCES

Background info for this report [Here](#)
SA Corona virus website [Here](#)
Real 411 to report misinfo [Here](#)

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, 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.

Contributors to this report through writing and inputs include the following members, who also participated in this week’s discussions co-chaired by government and civil society; NDOH, Free State DOH, KwaZulu-Natal DOH, NICD, UNICEF, Real411, University of Free State, Right To Care, Project Last Mile, Community Constituency Forum, Health Systems Trust, DG Murray Trust, and Covid Comms.

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