

South Africa Covid-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report 28 February 2022, Report 38

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March 4th, 2022|[Academic Articles](#)

This is a weekly report of Covid & vaccine sentiment, rumors & misinformation in SA. Further info [Here](#)

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KEY TRENDS IN COVID & VACCINE SENTIMENT

Negative sentiments prevail on social media and offline: Confusion and distrust at changes in Covid booster doses picked up across all social media platforms as well as conversations on the waiting period between doses, concerns for vaccine safety, continuing pro-rights debates against vaccine mandates and demands for pandemic transparency on the agreements between the government and manufacturers all feed conspiracists and anti vax, distrust in government. The sentiments on Facebook, Twitter, Call centre, WhatsApp were also driven by short-sighted comments. Read the full report [Here](#).

source: UNICEF

- 5,000% in Google searches for vaccine regimen, especially boosters.
- Less engagement overall – 50% less on Twitter and Facebook
- Digital news 25% down
- Health Justice Initiative court challenge – most shared.
- Online conversations – access and availability main (27% of conversations)

Pandemic transparency: Demands for disclosure of the content of the manufacturing agreements with government and contracting parties' identities by Health Justice Initiative created a media hype this week with more conspiracy theories on the exploitation of the poor nations ([Here](#)). There's a view that this move could "break open" the Covid secrets of Pfizer and J&J generating a lot of interest and debates.

Vaccine and HIV/AIDS: Misinformation about vaccine induced acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (VAIDS) continues becoming a widely spoken about trend across different modes of digital media. People are starting to cross pollinate ideas between vaccine hesitancy and the HIV vaccine, claiming that "*...people are testing HIV-positive after vaccinating*". This is spiking up traction across the platforms from people picking up links and spill over of Covid anti vax to the claims of HIV vaccine VAIDS = Vaccine-induced Auto-Immune Disease ([Here](#)).

Confusion around shifting of protocols: The shortening of the waiting period between vaccine doses from 6 to 3 months "without explaining the science behind it" was described as a "a whole cocktail of disaster". They were concerned about the "undisclosed long-term side effects". Others assumed that it was either "...the initial period was incorrect", "...and not informed by science or are you ditching the science?" Some said they would "...wait for the initial 6 months" and those who were hesitant did not care saying the "vaccines did not work anyway" and that they would "...keep steaming and drinking lemon". ([Here](#), [Here](#) and [Here](#)).

Distrust of Covid booster doses: – The sentiments on the mixing of Pfizer and J&J vaccine were varied. While some people were happy about this decision; many criticised it as; *“not a very stable scientific approach, considering that there are zero long-term studies on the synergistic effects of the vaccines with other medication”* and said the theory that it could be *“potentially beneficial”* was inconclusive without long-term studies. *“Science could be more indicative”* on the potential benefits, they said. ([Here](#) and [Here](#)).

Others thought it was a “...peak of capitalism from Pfizer and J&J” and claimed that *“the owners of these 2 companies must have signed an agreement to loot together”* or *“getting rid of their last obsolete stock”* to make *“huge profits”* from the *“mix n match”* theory.” ([Here](#)). Some people saw no need to vaccinate again after a second Pfizer dose, and others linked it to the depopulation unfounded rumour, “they saw that we were not dying as fast as they thought we would”. ([Here](#) and [Here](#)).

Continued need for information on boosters, timing regimen, isolation and quarantine: There is a strong view that the vaccination programme is being sabotaged when there is not enough counselling at the vaccination site about what to expect, duration of the side effects and what to do. More counselling by health workers is needed. “Standard minor side effects, if un-explained can lead to people feeling that vaccination is not working or is very dangerous and painful – which can lead to misinformation and vaccine hesitancy. It was reported that someone said after vaccination and obviously without the facts: *“I could manage the pain of having Covid-19 better than the after effects of vaccination”*

Most conversations are being driven by short-sighted comments on the following:

- Changes to booster regimen and mix and match are key
- Fear mongering around side effects
- Comments from people saying reporting should be stopped altogether
- Recurring theme of planning 5th wave with sentiments that Covid is man-made
- Numerous social media posts with false information relating to typhoid – e.g. about contaminated municipal water

Three peaks of engagement on social media:

- A question on ‘what happens if a mandatory vaccine makes you sick’ generated significant anti vax sentiments on Facebook
- Sceptics and vaccine hesitant continues to drive conversation on Twitter with content that is mostly driven by distrust of government around boosters and mandates, intellectual property surrounding the vaccine, who profits from the vaccine
- Conspiracy theories around the vaccine still including gene therapy and people are still being experimented on or manipulated

The Covid-19 Call Centre calls for assistance included the following:

- Changes to vaccination record

- Confusion on booster timing and schedule
- Help to access vaccination certificates
- Difficulty in retrieving vaccine codes
- Isolation and quarantine time frames
- Reassurance on standard side effects

Issues raised offline included the following:

- Vaccination of undocumented main issue in Limpopo and Gauteng
- (Limpopo overtaking this month – harvest time: points to need for vax programmes to be prepared for seasonal influxes)
- Confusion on booster doses
- Continued concern at vaccine safety, side effects and efficacy

DISTRICT REPORTS

- **Buffalo City (Eastern Cape).** One myth is that the J&J vaccine causes mental illness; and that vaccines are intended to kill old people. Reluctance to take the booster, with people saying there are now too many shots (originally

1 J&J and 2 Pfizer). Many youth simply say they aren't vaccinating because they don't want to, and don't want another conversation about it.

- **City of Johannesburg (Gauteng).** Some reports of vaccination increasing from fear of hospitalisation and death. There's still uncertainty about vaccination of people without ID documents.
- **Ekurhuleni (Gauteng).** Some people feel the pandemic is already over and so there is no reason to vaccinate. Some opposition to employers requiring vaccine certificates. Still some people have the view that the vaccine is "satanic".
- **Harry Gwala (KZN).** Over 35s have high rate of vaccination. Younger (12 – 34) are much more resistant. Some reported a vaccinated person catching Covid, so see little reason to vaccinate. Youth following social media hear that Covid is over so no need to vaccinate. However, some youth are vaccinating where education or work require a certificate.
- **Ehlanzeni (Mpumalanga).** Vaccination has increased this week, but not at the level of before the holidays. Vaccination sites in schools are effective. Covid is less in the news and appears to be less deadly, undermining motivation to vaccinate. Concern: If traditional medicine protected me from Covid for 2 years, why do I need a vaccination now? General feeling that the Covid emergency has passed.
- **Bojanala (North West).** Low level of vaccination now. Some say they will only vaccinate if forced by police or army to do so. Still transport problems – some people who want to cannot travel to the vaccination site. Continued mistrust of politicians undermining vaccination drive.
- **Khayelitsha KESS (Western Cape).** Reports of someone vaccinated who caught Covid makes others less interested. Disquiet about Boosters – do the medics really know if the vaccine works if the number of doses keeps changing? Others say I haven't caught Covid as my immune system is strong – so why do I need a vaccination now when Covid is getting weaker?
- **Cape Winelands (Western Cape).** Low level of vaccination uptake, possibly related to very hot weather. No particular new concern, but people say they are just not interested any more. Door-to-door loud-hailing seems the most effective way to get more people to vaccinate.
- **Garden Route (Western Cape).** Some working people don't vaccinate as sites are only open in working hours. The "Vaxi taxi" is effective in Oudtshoorn, especially bringing people from farms to sites. There is some confusion on whether vaccination can happen in secondary schools.
- **Namakwa (Western Cape).** Growing calls for mask-wearing to be called off. Unhappiness among unvaccinated people feeling they will be discriminated against for employment. Patients with other conditions (cancer, diabetes, TB etc) are unhappy due to the breakdown of other health services during the Covid emergency. There remains opposition to vaccination in some religious communities, especially the Rastafarians. Partnership with 2 local newspapers for the #KeReady youth campaign. Many youth feel the Covid virus is now very weak, and they still fear side effects and needles. Unhappiness that youth didn't get the incentives to vaccinate. Some have a "fatalistic attitude towards their own health because they are poor, jobless and always criticized as being bad-mannered and irresponsible".

MISINFORMATION

- **MISINFO:** Covid vaccines and boosters give you HIV. **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim at all. Vaccines, including Covid vaccines cannot cause AIDS / HIV or make us more susceptible to contracting this or any other virus. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** People aren't dying as planned so now government are pushing boosters to kill people faster. **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim, many vaccines have boosters, and evidence clearly demonstrates unvaccinated at far greater risk of severe illness. Most people who lost their lives to Covid in the 4th wave were unvaccinated or partially vaccinated. See [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** Vaccines are dangerous and now linked to “vaccine-acquired immunodeficiency syndrome” or “VAIDS”. **TRUTH:** There is no evidence at all to support the claim of immunodeficiency being related to Covid vaccines. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** Covid cases are low so now we don't need to vaccinate. **TRUTH:** Having lower case numbers doesn't mean there is no reason to be vaccinated. If you are unvaccinated you are more likely to spread Covid and encourage variants. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** Vaccines cause infertility and erectile dysfunction. **TRUTH:** No evidence to support these claims. Covid however can impair sexual performance. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** Vaccines have a tracker chip to track movement and shut you down if you misbehave. **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** Vaccines don't work—if they did they would stop us from getting Covid completely. **TRUTH:** If you have been vaccinated you are less likely to get Covid, and if you do get Covid it will most likely be far less severe. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** Covid vaccines requires the use of long painful needles. **TRUTH:** Covid vaccines may cause slight pain, like a poke or pinch for only a few seconds. See [here](#) and [here](#) for tips and advice to manage fear and pain.

AIRA Viral Facts Africa on this week's trends:

Over the last week, there has been a significant spike of claims that the COVID-19 vaccines are leading to immunodeficiency disorders. The rumours are not new but have still gained traction despite fact-checking organizations debunking the claims. The following are viral facts to help debunk misinformation.

- **HIV VARIANT:**

Dropbox: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/i3lionpalofvno2/AABtE15mGfU8ZCGaBohanHWca?dl=0>

Twitter EN: <https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1496734154868027399>

Facebook EN: <https://www.facebook.com/viralfacts/videos/4938258846260196>

- **VACCINE SAFETY AND EFFECTIVENESS**

Twitter EN: <https://twitter.com/viralfacts/status/1496082102374178819>

Facebook EN: <https://www.facebook.com/viralfacts/videos/692397961779969>

Facebook FR: <https://www.facebook.com/viralfacts/videos/673933103734234>

PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RCCE

- Act proactively to address misinformation being spread about vaccine induced acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (VAIDS). This is something to look out for because the HIV vaccine is becoming a widely spoken about trend across different modes of digital media. There is a need to refute in order to get facts in the public space that is supported by science.
- Call to monitor and report stats on long Covid and vaccine injuries.
- Ensure that all vaccination sites are well equipped with fact sheets on what to expect and how to manage after vaccination. More counselling by health workers is also required to counsel people as unexplained side effects can fuel misinformation.

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, 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, HealthEnabled, Deaf SA, SA National Council for the Blind, Treatment Action Campaign and Disability SA.

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