

South Africa COVID-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report

18 April 2022, Report 45

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

KEY TRENDS

Falling levels of online engagement on Covid-19 vaccines in South Africa social media.

- Dropped this week compared to last; down by 50% on Twitter, 60% on Facebook, 70% with digital news articles
- No new breakout searches or vaccine topics were reported this week
- Digital News articles about COVID-19 vaccines generated over 30,000 engagements
- Down 50% from the previous reporting period.

Decline in the demand for Covid-19 vaccines and boosters. A misguided belief that Covid-19 is over encouraging vaccine hesitancy and complacency. The demand for Covid-19 vaccine has fallen since the beginning of the year, as "people everywhere become more hesitant to take repeated booster shots, adding to the general vaccine reluctance" [Here](#), "We are tired of Covid-19" [Here](#).

Decreasing interest in the news about Covid-19. Low public and media interest in Covid news or messages are cited as barriers to vaccination and booster uptake. "Declining interest or avoidance of Covid-19 related news or messages is also common among younger ages with less fear of COVID-19." [Here](#)

Ongoing speculation on how many times one could continue taking vaccine shots. There is much speculation on social media about how long people should continue to take Covid-19 vaccines. Among the misinformed reactions are "until you become a zombie", "until the rapture happens", or "until six feet under". [Here](#)

Predictions of the coming Fifth Wave dismissed as "fear-mongering" on social media.

Epidemiologists have predicted the fifth wave of Covid infection in SA in the coming weeks, which has been dismissed on social media as "fear-mongering" and "fake news"; reports of the discovery of two new sub-variants of Omicron by SA scientists have also been dismissed as fake news. [Here](#)

Critical reactions to vaccine messages. There have been mainly negative reactions to social media posters from the Department of Health that "Vaccination remains our best form of protection against Covid-19" poster. Many commenters dismissed the statement as "nonsense" on social media because "if I can still be infected and spread the virus, I don't see how it is protection". [Here](#)

Persisting challenges in accessing vaccination certificates. There are many calls to the Contact Centre and searches online about this. Many people do not know how to download a certificate or how to obtain assistance. "How do I download a certificate", "How do I get a new code to download a certificate", or "to report a system failure". [Here](#), [Here](#), [Here](#)

Questioning the validity of the proof of vaccination for undocumented persons. People in South Africa without valid identity documents or who lost their IDs are permitted to vaccinate at all vaccination

sites. However, there is still scepticism about the validity of the proof of vaccination. “If I vaccinate without a valid ID, Passport, or birth certificate, what will you write as proof of vaccination?” “Will I get the same code as those with valid papers to download the vaccination certificate?” and “Where is it valid” - can I present it to an employer or when traveling abroad?” [Here](#), [Here](#) and [Here](#).

Uncertainty on vaccinating the immunocompromised. An announcement for an additional (extra) vaccination dose to be provided to immunocompromised adults prompted more questions, such as:

- Who is immunocompromised?
- Why must we continue to vaccinate after the second Pfizer dose?
- How many times must I take the booster?
- When must I take the next shot?
- Must I consult the doctor or clinic first?
- Are you offering health screening before vaccination?
- Is it safe for us not to wait 6 months for another shot?
- Can I take the booster shot on the right arm; my left arm is still painful from the two Pfizer shots?
- Why only adults, what about immunocompromised children?

There is still widespread uncertainty about many vaccination issues among people supportive of the vaccination campaign.

DISTRICT REPORTS

- **OR Tambo (Eastern Cape):** Many feel that Covid is no more as fewer people are getting sick and the President has lifted most of the regulations – meaning there is currently little motivation to vaccinate. The district team now have loud-hailers and transport and are more effective, but need more IEC like leaflets and posters.
- **Tshwane (Gauteng):** The Vooma Vaccination weekend has been effective, working with community radio and social media. Vaccine acceptance does seem to be increasing in youth, and KeReady is helping encourage them. There is uncertainty about vaccinating people without official documents.
- **Harry Gwala (KZN):** Vaccination is still very slow. Some youth were motivated to vaccinate when the President’s speech said that sports events will require vaccination certificates. A few vaccinated as they didn’t want to get Covid over Easter, and others do not want to hear about vaccination any more. Myths are still prevalent that the vaccine can kill you.
- **Ilembe (KZN):** Some youth remain adamant that they will not be vaccinated and will not change their minds, especially now the Covid-19 regulations and relaxing. Many people claim to know someone who was killed by the Covid vaccine (without being able to demonstrate this!). The Vooma Vaccination weekends do increase numbers of vaccinations.
- **Bojanala (North West):** Pop-up and mobile vaccination sites can be effective - vaccination sites should come to people where they live or work, e.g. farms as many won’t go to the vaccination site. Foreign nationals fear that vaccination is a strategy for the government to eliminate them from the country. KeReady2Flex has helped motivate some youth, though others say that KeReady is for rich youth in urban areas, not them. Many vaccination sites close too early in the afternoon so that working people cannot attend after work. Some of the vaccination teams aren’t working seriously. Many myths on Covid and vaccination are still circulating.
- **Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati (North West):** Youth are more exposed to misinformation as they use the internet and social media, where they are exposed to myths, e.g. people become zombies after vaccination; the vaccine will kill you; side effects are severe; it places a micro-chip; the vaccine is just for older people as they are the only ones who get sick with Covid. Demand creation is hampered by a lack of transport, rain and weak cooperation with various local partners. More vaccination sites have been set up in more convenient locations which reduces logistical barriers, though transport to sites remains a problem for many. KeReady has helped to motivate youth to vaccinate – but there is still a huge problem with most youth not wanting to vaccinate
- **Cape Winelands (Western Cape):** Pop-up sites are effective in encouraging new people to vaccinate. Requiring vaccination certificates is effective for encouraging youth who want to attend sport and social

events and employment. Foreign nationals are now supporting each other to vaccinate now that the issue of not requiring official documents has been resolved.

- **Central Karoo (Western Cape):** Going door-to-door really does increase numbers of people vaccinating. There is a feeling that Covid is over, so why do we need to keep vaccinating? Very few people are coming for a first vaccination, almost all are for boosters. Peer-pressure influences youth not to get vaccinated.
- **Garden Route (Western Cape):** The Vooma Weekend went well, but only convinced a few dozen more people to vaccinate. School representatives are less supportive of vaccination at schools now. Over 50s are coming for boosters, but youth are still mainly vaccine resistant.
- **Namakwa (Western Cape):** There is a growing 'Laissez faire' attitude (people don't care much) since the latest relaxation of Covid-19 regulations. Unvaccinated people are unhappy that they cannot attend sports events or employment opportunities, and feel bullied by the government. Over 50s are receiving booster vaccinations in numbers, though hesitancy in youth continues. There is still a need for transport for people in remote areas to go for vaccination. Predictions of a fifth wave of Covid mean that the pandemic is planned and controlled. Door-to-door visits are still having a good effect at persuading new people to vaccinate. The water crisis in many municipalities is undermining vaccination and other campaigns. Youth are still very resistant to vaccination – many say their bodies are strong so they don't need the vaccine, especially after 2 years of the pandemic.
- **Swartland (Western Cape):** Vaccine acceptance is slowly increasing for young people. Elderly people are accepting vaccines, but most young people totally refuse. They are scared of side effects and of injections. Some youth are not getting second doses as they fell sick after the first dose. The collaboration with community health workers is going well for local mobilisation.

MISINFORMATION

- **MISINFO:** ~~The prediction of a 5th wave shows that the pandemic is manipulated to control the population.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this. Predictions come from carefully considered epidemiological models, based on previous experience. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Pfizer's own data shows over 1,291 side effects of Covid vaccine.~~ **TRUTH:** It is true that a report from Pfizer released in 2021 does list 1,291 potential side effects of any new drug. However, this is NOT a list of side effects of their Covid vaccine; instead it is a list of the possible side effects that their study was watching out for. The vaccine is safe, being authorised by the SA Health Products Regulatory Authority and similar bodies around the world. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Foreigners will be deported if they try and get vaccinated.~~ **TRUTH:** While vulnerable people especially may be fearful, anyone in South Africa can be vaccinated, regardless of nationality. Foreigners are not arrested and deported while being vaccinated. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines cause infertility and erectile dysfunction.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support these claims. Covid however can impair sexual performance. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Covid cases are low so now we don't need to vaccinate.~~ **TRUTH:** Having lower case numbers is wonderful, but this 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:** ~~Covid vaccination can give you HIV.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim at all. Vaccines, including Covid vaccines cannot cause AIDS / HIV and do not make us more susceptible to contracting this virus. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Covid vaccines are dangerous and are 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](#).

VIRAL FACTS: (WHO Africa Infodemic Response Alliance)

➤ The importance of getting vaccinated

As many countries are starting to ease COVID-19 restrictions, some believe the pandemic is over. COVID-19 isn't over and vaccination still serves as the best chance against severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 infection. [\[LINK\]](#) [\[LINK\]](#)

➤ The pandemic is not over!

People are still becoming sick, hospitalized and dying of #COVID19. Declining attention to the pandemic doesn't mean the pandemic is over. [\[LINK\]](#) [\[LINK\]](#)

➤ COVID-19 effects on sexual performance

There's no evidence that the COVID-19 #vaccine affects fertility or sexual performance in men or women. Fear of vaccine side effects/ long-term effects continue to be misinterpreted or overstated [\[LINK\]](#)

New Viral Facts Africa campaign to counter vaccine hesitancy:

WHO in Africa has worked with the UK Government and Viral Facts Africa to create a new campaign to support Covid-19 vaccine demand across Africa. Building on the experience WHO and Viral Facts Africa have in countering the spread of health misinformation and disinformation in the African region, the UK Government has developed messaging based on insights and behavioural science expertise gained during the pandemic. [Link](#) to have an overview of the produced assets / Links to download ([Here](#))

PROPOSED ACTIONS: RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Build trust in Covid-19 vaccines messaging.** According to WHO AIRA, continuing to provide accurate information as a resource for individuals that may come across misinformation is crucial to preventing a loss of momentum in vaccine uptake as the perception of the pandemic being over will increase as Covid-19 public health and safety measures decrease.
- **Equity in vaccination access.** Many poorer areas, especially informal settlements and rural areas, have structural barriers to vaccination. There have also been reports that some vaccination sites in poorer areas will be closing. Analysis of this should be carried out at the district and sub-district levels, so that services offer equitable access to vaccination throughout SA. The approach means working with trusted local leaders, wide local communication, organising well-advertised pop-up sites where there is need, and clarifying that undocumented people are able to vaccinate.
- **Communications for the next Covid-19 phase.** The SA Covid-19 Vaccination Communication Strategy is to be reviewed and adjusted to be relevant to the changing situation with the pandemic in SA.

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:

OTHER RESOURCES

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

- **SA National Department of Health**
- **Covid Hotline:** Reports from the national Covid call centre
- **Praekelt.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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