

South Africa COVID-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report 10 December 2021, Report 30

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December 10th, 2021 | [Academic Articles](#)

This is a weekly report of COVID & vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Further info [here](#).

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### KEY TRENDS

- **Covid-19 vaccines efficacy search queries increased with the advent of Omicron** as well as conspiracies about the fabrication of the new variant. Queries online about “South Africa variant vaccine-resistant” increased greatly (+2,850%), with 700% on Twitter. [Here](#)
- **The top three online digital news** (i) UK halts flights from SA, bans South Africans, and says thanks for spotting new variant, (ii) Germany, Israel, and Singapore also imposing travel bans, and (iii) You have a week to get your first shot to beat a February vaccine mandate in SA. They generated over 335k engagements, +400%.
- **The top three offline concerns** noted during community feedback are (i) New variant is a scam – why new variant after peaceful elections, (ii) Vaccine equity concerns especially among undocumented persons and (iii) Covid is not ending soon – different waves forever coming.
- **More people are hesitant about booster shots:** In response to the news that Pfizer expects to know within two weeks whether the variant is resistant to its vaccine [Here](#), Some people are confused and frustrated. “So, we must get another vaccine shot every time there’s a new variant?” [Here](#)
- **Uncertainty and information voids observed and more foreseen** [Here](#) as experts are unclear “if Omicron causes more severe disease”. More questions about the symptoms since Dr Angelique Coetzee, who raised the alarm over the new strain, says; “the symptoms were different however they were also ‘mild’” [Here](#)
- **Misinformation spreads about the new variant that it’s resistant to vaccines.** Omicron’s multiple mutations are associated with increased

antibody resistance, which may reduce the effectiveness of vaccines, along with mutations that generally make it more contagious. [Here](#)

- **Prioritization of vaccinations of boys due for traditional initiations.** More parents requesting vaccinations for their sons to be prioritized for vaccinations before initiations. However, most of the boys are without proper documentation as in the case of one adopted child who contacted the National Covid Hotline call centre.
- **News of more unvaccinated patients being hospitalized for Covid** “unvaccinated patients suffered more severe symptoms than vaccinated ones, and are most likely to face hospitalization if infected by the new Covid-19 variant,’ according to NICD’s Dr Waasila Jassat, adding that 87% of all admissions in the country were unvaccinated patients. [Here](#)
- **Conversations that the new Covid variant was “planned”** because of the prediction made by medical scientists such as Prof Salim Abdool Karim regarding the 4th wave and a new variant. However, people are using the information to spread misinformation that suggests lack of trust in both governments and scientists [Here](#)
- **Immunocompromised criteria for 3rd vaccination are not well understood.** Immunocompromised citizens at vaccination sites in the Western Cape this week were turned away because they did not fulfil the immunocompromised criteria for third booster shots by not being able to produce referral letters. All FAQ’s & requirements needed have been updated on respective platforms.
- **End of School Parties are Covid super-spreaders.** Parents requested to discourage their children from participating in these celebrations where young people gather in large group that may flout Covid safety protocols and endanger lives. The Ballito Rage was suspended for the festive season.
- **Change of the demographic of COVID-19 patients.** More children under 5 years previously regarded as Covid low risk age group now being hospitalized for Covid. “We are seeing toddlers with symptoms and sick enough to be hospitalized and oxygen support. Concerns raised about the rise of infections in this age group, and those unvaccinated at higher risk of serious Covid infections and death.

## LOCAL / DISTRICT / PROVINCIAL ISSUES

This new section summarises social listening from areas around the country. For more information on reports from health districts, see [here](#).

- **Dr Ruth Segomotsing Mompoti:** A handful of people are still influencing others not to vaccinate based on their religious beliefs. Those who are pro-vaccine can’t afford transport to the nearest vaccination site – all that contributing to low vaccine uptake.
- **Ehlanzeni, Mpumalanga:** Experiencing low uptake of vaccines among older persons. Community mobilizers have recommended more community engagement events to educate and vaccinate others.

- **Bojanala, North West:** Most of the people less than 50 years old are complaining about being excluded from the vooma voucher campaign and they insist on waiting until their turn for vouchers.
- **Cape Winelands:** Communication has increased on the wine farms. While they are more receptive, they do not want to be forced to vaccinate.
- **Mangaung, Free State:** People who are still hesitant to vaccinate are now questioning the efficacy of the vaccines and do not want to vaccinate for the rest of their lives. Others believe they do not need to vaccinate because of their strong immune systems to fight off the virus.
- **Harry Gwala, KZN:** Vaccine acceptance is high among young people who responding positively to all the efforts to get them to vaccinate.
- **Garden Route, Western Cape:** The number of people coming for vaccination sites has dropped because they are preparing for Christmas festivities.
- **Khayelitsha, Cape Town, W Cape:** They want a once-off vaccine shot and want to get the incentives for vaccinating. Concern about whether unvaccinated people are allowed to travel to other provinces.
- **Namaqua, Northern Cape:** Young people want vouchers for data before vaccinating. There is more willingness amongst the 12 – 17-year-olds to vaccinate.
- **OR Tambo, Eastern Cape:** Increased number of people are afraid to vaccinate. They believe that the 2nd dose will make them very sick.
- **City of Johannesburg, Gauteng:** Vaccine acceptance is increasing but people's negative views about vaccines create doubt and fear. They believe the recent elections caused the surge of Covid cases.
- **Buffalo City:** People want to be incentivized to vaccinate and support transport to the vaccination site.

## MISINFORMATION

- **MISINFO:** ~~The Omicron variant is a scam — it is a means to control people and get more vaccine booster business for pharma companies.~~ **TRUTH:** Omicron is real, see [here](#). While there is much we don't know, here's what we know about Omicron, see [here](#). Also many vaccines have booster jabs, vaccine shown to be even more effective with a booster. Countries are encouraging people get booster, see [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Predictions of 4th Covid infection wave proves it is designed by people and is planned to control citizens.~~ **TRUTH:** South Africa has excellent epidemiologists and other scientists who have been using models to forecast when the 4th wave might arrive. They used data from previous waves to do so. It is good science and it is unpacked [here](#), and see [here](#) for a fact check on the prediction.
- **MISINFO:** ~~Covid numbers are being manipulated and fudged to keep us in lockdown and limit our human rights.~~ **TRUTH:** Covid figures are reported daily by the National Department of Health, (see [here](#)) as the 3rd wave subsided numbers went down and now they are going up as the fourth wave is starting. Data is also supported by the South African Medical Research Council which provides weekly excess death figures, see [here](#).

- **MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines don't work if they did they would stop us from getting Covid to begin with.~~ **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 level four or five lockdown is coming.~~ **TRUTH:** While the state of disaster has been extended to the 15th of December 2021, there is nothing to suggest a level four or five lockdown. See [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines cause infertility in men and women and negatively impacts their sexual performance.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support these claims but getting Covid negatively impact fertility and sexual function. See [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

## PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Continue with the production of information for community mobiliser to help them debunk rampant misinformation in the communities. More communications is needed.
- Continue providing accurate information with verified statistics on the risk of contracting the virus and the very low risk of severe symptoms after vaccination.
- Continue providing information that demonstrates that the risks associated with contracting Covid far outweigh the risks of vaccination, and why vaccines are considered safe and effective
- Continue to communicate through Covid Champions, i.e. those who have gotten the vaccine and/or influencers championing communication to the public as living testimonies
- Create clear, consistent messaging about vaccine developments and communicate, explaining what is known and what is unknown.
- Emphasize hopeful messages highlighting vaccines are crucial for ending the pandemic and share solidarity messages around protective measure and safe behaviours
- Many people are willing to take the vaccine because they want to be with their loved ones during the Christmas holidays, avoid another hard lockdown and possible fourth wave of the Covid Pandemic. The R100 voucher incentive seems to be having the desired effect, because many unvaccinated people in the over 60 age group are inquiring whether it is true or just a hoax.
- Flood Social Media with messages that encourages non-pharmaceutical interventions such as mask wearing, outdoor social gatherings, ventilation (open windows) and good air circulation in confined spaces.

## 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
- **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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