

South Africa COVID-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report 27 September 2021, Report 20

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September 30th, 2021 | [Academic Articles](#)

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

You may download a pdf of this report [here](#)

### KEY TRENDS

- **Widespread concerns about vaccine equity** following the reports that UK continue to consider people who received the jab in Africa as “unvaccinated” for the purposes of entering the country and quarantine policies, prompting doubts about the quality of vaccines distributed in Africa.
- **Covid-19 vaccines related search queries:** Growing interest over the past week in the news on “UK government on African vaccine”, “Anti-vaccine protest sea point”, “Schalk van der Merwe” (with +2900% searches), “Can pregnant women get Covid vaccine?” (+150%), “Coronavirus vaccine tracker” (+140%), “Can you drink alcohol after Pfizer vaccine?” (+130%), and “When do side effects start after Covid vaccine?” (+60%). [here](#) Tweets about COVID-19 vaccines in the country generated 40k engagements, a **30% decrease** compared to the previous reporting period. Here [here](#) and [here](#)
- **Ongoing social media engagements** about “forced” vaccination almost doubled compared to last week. Internal vaccine passports were also a cause of concern in South Africa and news that unvaccinated people will not be allowed in churches was a key issue. News articles on digital media about COVID-19 vaccines generated over 55k engagements, a **40% decrease** compared to the previous reporting period\*. Top articles on digital news media by engagement include: [here](#) [here](#) [here](#) [here](#) and [here](#)
- **COVID-19 vaccine twitter and digital news:** Online conversations about Covid-19 vaccines generated most engagements in the past week were related to access (17%), immunity (16%), and safety (15%). Facebook posts about Covid-19 vaccines generated 120 000 over the past week **30% decrease** compared to previous.

- **Online vaccine literacy training sessions by Section 27 revealed more information gaps:** More questions about vaccine safety and efficacy revealed that illiteracy about covid-19 and vaccines was a key factor for vaccine hesitancy. Others wanted to know more about the long-term vaccine adverse events for people with chronic diseases, pregnant women and their babies. Some were interested in knowing about the period it took for personal immunity to kick in after vaccination, why vaccinated people could still contract covid-19 and infected others even after vaccination, and the time one should wait before vaccination after a cold or covid-19.
- **War of words between the vaccinated and unvaccinated:** Unvaccinated people concerned about how the general vaccinated population discriminates against them. [here](#) “The unvaccinated are being treated like social outcasts. This is already happening in other countries.” [here](#)
- **Conversations in one post about why people do not want to vaccinate:** Most of their reasons for refusing to vaccinate were related to their faith, beliefs, traditions, government mistrust, fear of long-term side effects, rumours about vaccine deaths, believing their immune systems were strong to fight off the virus and others wanted more access to interactive platforms to ask questions
- **Coerced and/or forced vaccinations:** Some people sceptical about government Covid-19 interventions, their effectiveness and the actual need for Covid-19 vaccinations. The president of the African Transformation Movement’s tweet about “no forced vaccinations” went viral. The post received traction, 399 retweets, 22 quotes, and 990 likes. The quotes and replies had mixed sentiments, with others disagreeing with him and some applauding the party for their stance. [here](#)
- **Organised groups driving anti-vaccination sentiments both online and offline:** An investigation by ACBC revealed that ongoing protests against vaccines and anti-vaccine damaging sentiments through **#NoVaccineDompass** and **#NoVaccinePassports** were undermining the vaccination programme. This week, the African Christian Democratic Party shared a tweet [here](#) on its march against mandatory vaccines [here](#) and several individuals posted to demonstrate their support.
- **Positive public sentiments:** More than 70 percent comments on [HealthZA](#) this week were positive with fewer than 20 percent requests for more information to help them make informed decisions, others still on the fence or totally against vaccination. [here](#) and [here](#)
- **Community workers intensifying national efforts to address hesitancy:** Community workers, community mobilisers, neighbourhood agents and volunteers continuing to address hesitancy and assisting those without the resources to register for vaccination in the rural areas.
- **Calling for more pro-vaccination content to persuade skeptics:** Amongst the vaccination skeptic data that was found this week, several accounts shared messages that actively tried to persuade those who might be susceptible to consuming misleading information. The [tweet](#)
- **More people calling for both vaccines to be available in all vaccination sites for people to choose:** People are already shopping around for their preferred vaccines [here](#)

## LOCAL / DISTRICT / PROVINCIAL ISSUES

This new section summarises social listening from areas around the country. For more information on reports from 13 health districts [here](#)

- **Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati, North West:** There is a sturdy increase of people getting vaccinated in Locations around Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati. Young people who previously responded negatively, are now willing to vaccinate. Transport remains a major challenge for people to reach the vaccination sites.
- **Ekurhuleni, Gauteng:** Vaccination acceptance is increasing in this district because of the positive stories being shared within the communities by people who have already vaccinated and ensuring that they have access to relevant information that addresses their concerns. Misinformation is also rife about the use of vaccine for depopulation and to control people.
- **Garden Route, Western Cape:** Concerns about vaccine illiteracy levels which causes hesitancy. Traditional leaders and man of faith as trusted people required to help drive awareness activities, and to debunk myths and provide facts about vaccine benefits
- **Cape Metro, Western Cape:** Positive public response after sessions on Covid-19 to respond to questions and provide facts. After the sessions, more people visited the vaccinations sites for vaccinations.
- **King Cetshwayo, KwaZulu-Natal:** Vaccine acceptance is increasing in the area because of the frequent visits to the villages and malls by community workers to provide information, and get more people vaccinated by visiting their churches and tribal council to get their leaders to talk to them.
- **Ehlanzeni, Mpumalanga:** A continuous increase of the number of people being vaccinated every week. Support on the ground at the vaccination sites to address questions assisting to address further questions about side effects.
- **Namaqua, Northern Cape:** More vaccine acceptance in the district but there are concerns about ongoing misinformation on vaccine killing people in the area.
- **Bojanala, North West:** Vaccine acceptance the lowest in this district. The district is largely rural and it is difficult for many people to reach the vaccination sites. There are also not enough vaccine outreach teams to cover the area.
- **Mangaung, Free State:** There has been a rise in the vaccine uptake in the area this past week. Vaccine outreach teams are targeting people who are willing to vaccinate to assist them and addressing their challenges including that there are not enough open vaccination sites during weekends.

## MISINFORMATION

- **MISINFO:** ~~All vaccines are filth, and therefore haram, thus not fit for use by the Muslim community.~~ **TRUTH:** As noted by the Islamic Medical Association of South Africa, Muslims should take cognisance of the fact that over the years, vaccines have succeeded in preventing countless cases of infectious

diseases and their complications resulting in reduction of disabilities and literally millions of lives saved! See official statement [here](#).

- **MISINFO:** ~~Vaccines are not “fully approved”, that it is a trial and can only be fully approved in 2027. They allege that this is carried in a letter sent out by the FDA [here](#)~~ **TRUTH:** This inaccurate and misleading. I could derail government’s efforts of an effective roll-out of vaccines and vaccine information campaigns and programmes.

## PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Continue providing accurate information with verified statistics on the risk of contracting the virus and having severe symptoms after vaccination
- Continue providing information to demonstrate that the risks associated with contracting COVID-19 far outweigh the risks of vaccination
- Continue to communicate through change champions, i.e. those who have gotten the vaccine and/or influencers championing communication to the public as living testimonies

## ISSUES RAISED FOR FOLLOW-UP:

- There are data-free applications and subsidized telecommunications companies that can be used to assist to register more people by community workers and volunteers

## 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), People's Vaccine Campaign**
- **Centre for Communication Impact, Centre for Analytics & Behavioural Change, Section 27**
- **Medical Research Council, National Institute for Communicable Diseases, Right To Care,**
- **SA Vaccination and Immunisation Centre, Health Systems Trust, HSRC, IPSOS**
- **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, DG Murray Trust, 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.

**Contact:**

Nombulelo Leburu, National Department of Health. [Nombulelo.leburu@health.gov.za](mailto:Nombulelo.leburu@health.gov.za) 082 444 9503

Peter Benjamin, HealthEnabled. [peter@healthenabled.org](mailto:peter@healthenabled.org) 082 829 3353

Charity Bhengu, National Department of Health. [charity.bhengu@health.gov.za](mailto:charity.bhengu@health.gov.za) 083 679 7424