

South Africa Covid-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report 9 February 2022, Report 35

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

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### KEY TRENDS

**Covid-19 vaccines related search queries.** Interest in the search queries about “Covid regulations South Africa” increased on Google over the past week by 4 350%, especially on the following:

- **New Covid-19 regulations to enforce isolation of ‘symptomatic’ patients.** New Covid-19 regulations require the isolation of symptomatic patients who refuse treatment and admission at a health facility, including a provision that they can be held for 48 hours at such a facility before a warrant is obtained to extend their isolation period ([Here](#)).
- **New Covid-19 regulations reduce the period for self-isolation.** The 10-day period of self-isolation for those with symptoms has also been reduced to seven – unless a doctor says otherwise ([Here](#)).
- **New Covid-19 regulations scrap quarantine for ‘asymptomatic’.** All isolation requirements for coronavirus carriers who are asymptomatic have been dropped ([Here](#)).
- **New Covid-19 regulations to return to normal schooling.** Following pressure to align regulations with the current state of the coronavirus pandemic, learners are to return to school full-time ([Here](#)).

**Covid-19 vaccine conversation on Facebook and Twitter in SA.** Facebook generated 45 000 engagements over the past week, +60% compared to the previous week, and 19k engagements on Twitter, +50% compared to the previous week. The

top 5 conversations on Facebook and Twitter were about unverified claims, misinformation and valid concerns. *"It is better to be infected by a fellow vaxxed person not by an unvaxxed. Covid has reduced brain capacity", "employees who can't provide valid reasons for refusing to get vaccinated can be fired if the employer cannot find them a position with less or no risk of Covid infection", "Big up @Bruce Fordycerum who is bravely refusing to discriminate against Park Run participants who do not want to or can't be given a Covid vaccine despite the pressure to do so...", "The majority of SAns have rejected these Covid vaccines... stop your coercion and threats.", and "I have just lost my uncle because of Covid vaccine" ([Here](#)).*

**Vaccination certificate.** Interest in the search queries about "[Vaccination](#) certificate health.gov.za" rose to +300% on Google search this week. Queries on "How to download vaccination certificate" rose to +110%. Ongoing concerns were about people struggling to download the certificates, *"I have vaccinated but struggling to download the vaccine certificate. I have tried twice to get mine downloaded..."* ([Here](#)), *"I am also struggling. What could be the issue."* ([Here](#)), *["Bcoz its lie.. they lie to the citizens..."](#)* ([Here](#)), *["I took a vaccine 5 December until now I have not received vaccination certificate what must I do because I need it"](#)* ([Here](#)) and *["What I have to do to get certificate if I have lost the number I gave when I got my vaccine."](#)* ([Here](#)).

**CCMA and vaccine resistant employees.** Interest on "CCMA Covid vaccine" rose by +160% in searches on Twitter with 1 400 interactions on Facebook after the second CCMA ruling on mandatory vaccination ([Here](#)). The "CCMA upholds the suspension of the devout Christian who refused Covid-19 jab" news headline received mixed public reactions which included; *"Freedom of religion is a Constitutional right that is being violated"; "Being anti-vaxx has nothing to do with Christian values and beliefs"; "Losing his job for refusing to vaccinate on religious basis as per the Constitution is pretty much a violation of his right", "CCMA doing the Devil's work" and "There's nothing wrong in putting your trust in God only."* ([Here](#)).

**Online conversations about Covid-19 vaccines.** Effectiveness (37%), followed by access and availability (17%), and safety (15%) generated most of the online engagements about Covid vaccines this week but most of them were positive' *"...so long as they are vetted by the scientific community as they have and work to the benefit of mankind rather than against it"* ([Here](#)).

**Local vaccine production.** Public reaction to opening of the vaccine production facility in Cape Town has been positive, with President Ramaphosa stating, *"The pandemic has revealed the huge disparities that exist within and between countries in access to quality healthcare, medicines, diagnostics and vaccines."* ([Here](#)).

**Effects of Covid treatments on pregnancy and infant health.** Ongoing investigations of the safety of Covid-19 treatments for pregnant women and long-term effects of treatments on their pregnancy and child raised mixed feelings. Most of the people welcomed the effort but others pointed out inconsistency in messaging. *"At first they said children were resilient then children became the main carriers."* and *"they were unsure of whether pregnant women should vaccinate because no study had been conducted, later they encouraged women to vaccinate. Go figure!"* ([Here](#) and [Here](#)).

**Delta more severe to children than Omicron variant (Study):** A finding that children under the age of five who get infected with Covid-19 for the first time with the Omicron variant don't get as sick as children who got Delta has generated positive reaction with few negative comments ([Here](#)). Some people were concerned about confusing messaging. *"Ur story keeps on changing" and "they are covering up that vaccinated kids are getting seriously ill"* ([Here](#)).

**South African learners lose schooling due to Covid-19 (Study):** School children in SA have lost approximately 1.3 years of schooling since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The average 10-year-old in 2021 knew less than the average 9-year-old in 2018 ([Here](#)). The reaction on this article was mixed. *"Our children have lost nothing. They will learn more things and explore about how tragedies struck us and in the future this is pure history for them"* ([Here](#)).

**Split public opinion on vaccine mandates.** Around the world, regulations vary about vaccine mandates, with increased opposition to "forced vaccinations", with different approaches to imposing a direct mandate or implementing alternative penalty measures for those who resist vaccination ([Here](#) and [Here](#)). Comments from SA included *"Why are you allowing Universities to proceed with Vaccine mandates when you promised that no student would be refused learning based on being vaccinated or not?"* ([Here](#)). *"eish bra if you do not vaccinate you will not be allowed into the workplace. Thanks to the employers who took the bribe so that they can enforce this thing on their employees"* ([Here](#)).

## DISTRICT REPORTS

- **Buffalo City (Eastern Cape)** An increasing number of learners over 12 years are vaccinating with the Vooma vaccination campaign in schools. However, there is still misinformation that "Real vaccines are still coming, the ones used now are just samples hence there are booster doses" which is confusing people.
- **OR Tambo (Eastern Cape)** Changes in messaging lead to vaccine hesitancy. "You keep changing what you say about the number of doses that people must take" and others said they would vaccinate when they are eligible for the incentives.
- **Ekurhuleni (Gauteng)** There is concern that vaccine resistant parents are not allowing their children to vaccinate at school. There is some hostility to vaccinating undocumented foreign nationals, "People are asking questions as to why are undocumented people being vaccinated as doing so would open more doors for the undocumented people to enter South Africa".
- **Johannesburg (Gauteng)** Fear of needles and of dying from side effects were among the main reasons for resisting vaccination. However, other people are happy that professional social workers are available to address their fears.
- **Harry Gwala (KZN)** There is decreased vaccine acceptance and concerns that people will start dying after two years. Some people who were previously hesitant said that they did vaccinate to keep their jobs or to gain university entrance due to vaccine mandates.
- **Bojanala (North West)** Although the vaccination numbers have increased among young people aged 12-17 years since schools opened, there is still

resistance to vaccination because of misinformation. Some people believe that the government wants to control them through vaccination because “the vaccine has a chip so that can use to track our movements and how long we live”.

- **Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompoti (North West)** People are skeptical about vaccines since they heard about booster shots and are questioning vaccine effectiveness. Others are scared that the vaccine side effects could kill them.
- **Garden Route (Western Cape)** Some community members believe that, “There is no Covid now and things are going back to normal”. Most of these people only wear masks in town and clinics. There are unverified claims of people dying after vaccination, though more people were interested in real facts.
- **Khayelitsha (Western Cape)** The priority is to vaccinate all nurses in the areas with the lowest vaccination numbers. There are positive reports of synergy work between community leaders, church leaders and young people to address vaccine hesitancy, especially the fear of side effects.
- **Winelands (Western Cape)** An increasing number of people are coming for vaccination after door-to-door visits and loud hailing. There are unverified claims of many people dying after Covid-19 vaccination and there is low compliance with mask wearing.

## MISINFORMATION

- **MISINFO:** Churches were closed during lockdown to enable the devil's vaccine to do its work. **TRUTH:** Public gatherings especially indoor gatherings are known spreader events, and churches where there is often singing helped in spreading Covid. 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:** Vaccines have a tracker chip to track movement and shut you down if you misbehave. **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim – it is nonsense. See [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** People are dying from the Covid vaccine, and the government is hiding how many. **TRUTH:** There is no evidence of anyone dying in South Africa as a result of the vaccine ([here](#)) and the SA Health Products Regulatory Authority is investigating all reports of this. Over 90% of people who lost their lives to Covid in the 4<sup>th</sup> wave in SA were unvaccinated or partially vaccinated. See [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** Vaccines don't work if they did they would stop us from getting Covid to begin with. **TRUTH:** While vaccines are not 100% effective at stopping Covid infection, if you're vaccinated you are less likely to get Covid, and if you get Covid it's very likely be far less severe. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).
- **MISINFO:** Foreigners will be deported if they try and get vaccinated. **TRUTH:** While vulnerable people such as undocumented foreigners may be

more fearful of authorities, anyone in South Africa can be vaccinated, regardless of nationality. See [here](#) and [here](#). No one in SA has been deported due to going for a Covid vaccination.

### **ADVISORY SUPPORT: WHO Africa Infodemic Response Alliance (AIRA)**

- **Information Gaps** Omicron continues to serve as a topic of contention. Throughout the uptick in Omicron cases and even as the spread is trending downward in some regions of Africa, Omicron has caused considerable confusion. Many reputable sources claim Omicron is a “mild” variant in regard to symptoms, while others claim that dubbing the variant as “mild” was irresponsible. The mild status has led to a belief that the disease is no longer a threat, and medical professionals that try to correct the misunderstanding have been accused of fear-mongering and trying to extend the pandemic for personal profit and gain. **Clarity on Omicron or future variants being more “mild” needs to be addressed in terms of risk and mitigation.**
- Vaccine uptake is gradually increasing in Africa as vaccines become more accessible. Social media narratives highlight anti-vaccine rhetoric but it is also gradually decreasing. Momentum for vaccine uptake is threatened by rumors and misinformation and **needs to continually be addressed as new reasons for declining vaccination emerge.**
- Intensified pressure to vaccinate, even the perception of a “forced vaccine” that threatens an individual’s livelihood, will be met with strong opposition. **Curbing this rhetoric with factual information and getting ahead of misleading claims made by even reputable news sources is vital at this period.**

### **PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- **Clarify booster eligibility and process.** New communication is required to explain to people how to calculate their due dates for boosters, that they should take their vaccine cards to the site and that they do not need to wait for an SMS from the Department of Health or a prompt from medical aid.
- **Messaging around the new Covid regulations is needed.** There is confusion, especially why people who are Covid infected (but asymptomatic) don’t need to isolate. This is taken by many people to mean Covid isn’t really a problem any more.
- **Emphasize accurate information around resistance to the vaccines,** with statistics on the risk of contracting Covid and having severe symptoms for vaccinated people.
- **Create clear, consistent messaging about vaccine developments** and communicate often about what is known and unknown
- **Promote vaccine success stories.** Trusted figures that have taken the vaccine need a greater media presence.
- **Target youth.** The largest unvaccinated population is youth who are the most vaccine-resistant age cohort.
- **Produce communication on SA vaccine production.** Spread the positive message of the new vaccine production plant in SA, building pride in SA’s

ability reduce vaccine apartheid with many African countries not receiving sufficient vaccine doses.

- **Produce communications on vaccine mandates.** Clarify that vaccine mandates are not “forced vaccination” and some organisations, such as companies and universities, are requiring this through safety concerns – why they are important and what are the associated risk.
- **Help people find sites.** Advertise how to find vaccine sites ([here](#) and [here](#)) and the call centre number 0800 029 999 should be widely publicised and shared with provinces.

## 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, GCIS
- **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, CHAPS, PSI, PLM, 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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