

South Africa Covid-19 & Vaccine Social Listening Report

19 September 2022, Report 67

This is a weekly report of Covid-19 and vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Thanks to all who contribute to this report each week.

KEY TREND

Covid-19 vaccine concerns. CDC has admitted that post-vaccine myocarditis concerns that were labelled Covid-19 misinformation, were legitimate. This included concerns about the inflammation of the heart muscle, potentially leading to blood clots, heart attacks or stroke. This was described as significant departure from last year's narrative "*pushed by health bureaucrats and the media*". "*The corporate media and its fact checkers were quick to label them misinformation. They can no longer deny, there is data to back it.*"

Although the benefits of vaccines far outweigh the risks, many people have misrepresented the CDC statement as "admission of guilt". The sentiments included, "*CDC admitted that it gave false information regarding the safety of the vaccines, and as a result many people suffered heart inflammation and many of them died.*" They discouraged people from taking vaccines and boosters. Due to low jabs uptake, government plans to destroy 8.5 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine at the end of October. '*A shocking-indictment and questions need to be asked about how effective the country's vaccination drive has been.*'

Neuro adverse events. The report of the second fatal case of Guillain-Berre syndrome reported this week linked to the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine ([Here](#)), was received with negative comments. "*The wheels are coming off!*" ([Here](#)), "*Falling like flies all over the world and passed off as coincidence's wake up!*" ([Here](#)) Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) was a rare but potentially severe neurological adverse event that is associated with the administration of various vaccines and other medicines. ([Here](#))

Omicron subvariant risks. A study of the trends of reinfection by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, confirmed that "*Your chance of getting Covid-19 again is much higher than if you had the Delta and Beta variants,*" The NICD also found that the two subvariants that are currently dominant in South Africa, BA.4 and BA.5, also caused a gradual increase in reinfections but not higher than the "original" Omicron variant, known as BA.1. However, these findings were dismissed as "*fear mongering*" on social media. ([Here](#))

Women more vulnerable to Long Covid-19. At least 17 million people in Europe suffered from "long Covid" lasting at least three months within the first two years of the pandemic, according to a new study by the World Health Organization. Women were also twice as likely as men to *experience long Covid*. *Among serious cases resulting in hospitalization, one in three women developed long-term symptoms. Vaccination remains a preferred option to reduce the risks of long-covid*

Lowest Covid-19 deaths. Deaths from Covid-19 last week were the lowest since March 2020, the UN agency reports. "*We are not there yet. But the end is in sight,*" says WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters at a virtual press conference.

Covid-19 testing dropped. There was growing concern about a drop in Covid-19 testing after the end of the state of emergency, creating a false impression that the end of pandemic was near. "People assume the country is over the pandemic [\(Here\)](#) and these assumptions were informed by mis-dis information on social media. Data shows that regions and countries where *misinformation* thrived experienced more lethal pandemic waves despite vaccine availability.

The sentiments were critical of continuing to test for Covid-19. "Not so long ago Bill Gates was here, now this (testing) again,[\(Here\)](#) "enough is enough, we have moved on" and COVID-19 is over. [\(Here\)](#) "Why must we test when your Johnson vaccine is killing people?"[\(Here\)](#). A few said they were against testing because "it was painful, Yhoo ibuhlungu lento efakwa ekhaleni. [\(Here\)](#)

Others believed that Covid-19 was no longer a threat because of the decreasing new infections. Their sentiments included, "the official news announcing the sionstate of Covid assaults have lowered globally, giving us the impression that the Behemoth, the Covid, is now either asleep or dead" [\(Here\)](#) and "we need to move on." [\(Here\)](#)

Vaccine mandates. The employers who continue to request proof of vaccination from their workers were criticised as defiant to change/ "That is unconstitutional since the state of disaster ended", "unconstitutional for employers to demand employees to take experimental drugs" and "ask your future employer if they are going to be liable for all the medical expenses that might come with you taking the vaccine." [\(Here\)](#)

"Covid-19 vaccine were unquestionably unconstitutional and fraudulent", many people "were not able to give informed consent", and some believed employers should be held accountable for vaccine injuries and deaths because of vaccine mandates". [\(Here\)](#)

Sixth Wave expected. The predictions of the sixth wave were linked to the mutation of Covid-19, "If COVID continues to mutate, South Africa may see the sixth wave." [\(Here\)](#) "COVID-19 continues to mutate because of the drastic drop in COVID-19 testing" [\(Here\)](#) Professor Hannelie Meyer, Head of the South African Vaccination and Immunisation Centre at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences, said *this forecast is based on patterns identified since the pandemic started in 2020*. However, current predominant variants were sub-variants of Omicron, and they had not led to an overall increase in the number or severity of new infections. But these sub-variants were spreading more rapidly and were more transmissible. [\(Here\)](#) "Using fearmongering" and "we ain't scared of the sixth wave. [\(Here\)](#)

Healthcare workers and Covid-19. Amid Covid-19, global health systems not ready for new pandemic. In the face of current pressures due to poor funding, staff shortages, and inadequate preparation, the healthcare workers would not cope with another pandemic, according to a survey to assess the effects of covid on health and care workers. *Lack of preparation is one of the biggest threats facing their national health systems if another pandemic were to break out on the heels of COVID-19 in the next five years.*

Covid-19 variants. Most of Covid-19 variants found in Africa came from abroad and yet the continent suffered the most because of selective restrictions, according to a study. The scientists from Stellenbosch and KwaZulu Natal universities reported that while the sequencing data for Omicron showed that Europe was responsible for most early infections in Africa, Europe did not suffer the same discrimination that Africa had to endure. *Although most flights were put on hold worldwide, Europe didn't face any selective restrictions on travel, the study-find.* /

Covid-19 PPE fraud. The government's Special Investigating Unit found that corruption of fraud accounted for 66% of all national funding set aside for Personal Protective Equipment for Covid-19, confirming the many social media claims about the looting of the Covid-19 funds by the elite and politicians. *"This was particularly noticeable during the COVID-19 pandemic"*, according to sentiments on [twitter](#).

Monkeypox reporting. Local reporting on monkeypox ([Here](#)) was described as "fear mongering" and the sentiments included "we will never fall for such crap anymore", "the vaccinated will be dying and nobody would want to talk about it like it's happening with Covid" and "stop playing with people's lives". ([Here](#))

The NICD conducted 372 monkeypox laboratory tests from persons suspected of monkeypox disease between 25 May and 13 September. No secondary case has been linked to the five confirmed monkeypox cases in South Africa. The tests do not include the tests conducted by the private sector. Even though the risk of monkeypox to the general South African public is considered low, health workers should be on high alert and maintain a high index of suspicion for any individuals presenting with unexplained acute rash or skin lesions.

Great concern as Nigeria registers 21 monkeypox [cases](#) in one week. "Vaccines can prevent monkey pox, but vaccines are currently in short supply worldwide". *Among the 21 [cases](#) reported in 2022 so far, there has been no evidence of any new or unusual transmission of the virus, nor changes in its clinical manifestation documented (including symptoms, profile and virulence).*

Impact of Covid-19 on TB. Call for the strengthening of advocacy and social mobilisation for the recovery of lost TB patients during the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of its TB recovery plan, government has committed to using National Strategic Plan for HIV, TB, and STIs to eliminate tuberculosis as a public health threat by 2030. The new plan is expected to be launched next year. [Here](#)

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Umlazi, KwaZulu-Natal. A number of Covid-19 and HIV/AIDS community dialogues with the youth cohort and men aged 35-49 were held in Umlazi this week as part of the demand creation drive for health services. This project was described as embedded in the Health Systems Trust's DO ART programme driven by a community-based approach to ARV treatment and care. The integration of campaigns was said to be informed by the fact that *"Misinformation is a common thread between the COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS pandemics – with deadly consequences"*.

Westfalia Fruit Farm, Tzaneen, Limpopo Province. One of the strategies that have boosted South Africa's Covid-19 vaccination drive involved decentralizing the rollout to the grassroots. Provincial health authorities deployed teams to communities to ensure an increased update of the vaccine. In addition to the vaccination, the teams also provided other services such as HIV testing to the farm workers. *"When I heard that there is a programme coming to the worksite to give us our COVID-19 boosters, I signed up immediately. I got my first two vaccines in 2021 and this is my third one. My health is my priority," said a farm worker.*

MISINFORMATION

~~**MISINFO:** A New variant of COVID Omicron BA2.75 is more infectious and deadly than the current Omicron 5 variant.~~ **TRUTH:** Only one case in July in South Africa, and not enough known about BA 2.75. Most cases in South Africa are Omicron 5. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Covid vaccines cause heart attacks and inflammation of the heart.~~ **TRUTH:** While there are some cases of inflammation of the heart (myocarditis, the risk is very low, see [here](#)) there is no evidence to support claims that covid vaccines directly cause heart attacks. See [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines side effects are being under reported and can kill you. SA Adverse reactions site shows how many have died!~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim, most side effects are mild and self-resolving. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). SA has excellent adverse reporting mechanisms backed by evidence see [here](#) for credible local site on adverse reactions.

~~**MISINFO:** The second COVID Vaccine death reported by SAHPRA is one of hundreds of those who have died from being vaccinated.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to back up this claim. SAHPRA was transparent because it was the second clearly attributable death. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** COVID vaccinations make you more susceptible to serious illness and death and most COVID deaths now are triple vaccinated people.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support these claims. More people did lose their lives during COVID – due to COVID not the vaccine see [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** More than half of the pregnant women miscarried during the Pfizer vaccine trial.~~ **TRUTH:** Not true, the figures released were based on inaccurate data and miscarriage trends were in line with people outside of the trial. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** COVID vaccines are not safe for children.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support the claim. Vaccines have been found to be safe for children. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)

~~**MISINFO:** Monkey Pox and Chicken Pox are the same thing and used to spread fear.~~ **TRUTH:** Monkeypox is an orthopoxvirus, while chickenpox is a herpes virus and shingles are not the same virus. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** People who have been vaccinated are more likely to get seriously ill from COVID.~~ **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim. People who have been vaccinated are far less likely to experience severe symptoms. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Messages saying you have participated in a COVID drug trial asking you to take action to get paid are legitimate.~~ **TRUTH:** Participation in any legitimate clinical trial in South Africa requires informed consent, and any payments have to be approved by an ethics committee and will usually only cover transport. See [here](#) for all the policies followed locally and [here](#) for informed consent.

~~**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:** The UK government is withdrawing Pfizer Covid vaccine for pregnant and breastfeeding women.~~ **TRUTH:** Governments have not withdrawn advice for pregnant and breastfeeding women to not be vaccinated. SA government recommends being vaccinated. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)

~~**MISINFO:** Monkeypox is just the scam name for the side effects of the Pfizer covid vaccine.~~ **TRUTH:** Monkeypox is a viral disease and not an autoimmune disease so it cannot be caused by a side effect to a vaccine and the vaccines do not have any live virus in them. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Monkey pox is the new Covid and is scam to control or kill us.~~ **TRUTH:** Monkey Pox is not new but it has changed to allow it to spread further but it is a different disease and different virus to COVID. See [here](#) and [here](#)

~~**MISINFO:** COVID Regulations been dropped so no need to get vaccinated now and they don't help anyway.~~ **TRUTH:** It's still recommended to ventilate spaces and get vaccinated as it will prevent serious illness. See [here](#) and [here](#)

WHO Africa Infodemic Response Alliance (AIRA) & Viral Facts

AIRA is the Africa-wide initiative of the World Health Organisation, managing the infodemic of misinformation and communications overload related to Covid-19 and vaccination. They produce the Viral Facts content responding to misinformation which can be used freely. You can find previous AIRA infodemic trends reports now hosted on the [AIRA page](#) and [TechNet-21](#).

Key Monkeypox Misinformation Trends

~~"New" strain of monkeypox has been identified.~~ A second strain of monkeypox has reportedly been discovered in the United Kingdom after an individual travelled to West Africa. While a significant portion is focused on the potential stigma this will cause for the region, others have claimed the report of the case coming from West Africa is simply, "more lies."

What to do: Address the claims that the strain is new and clear up the "clickbait" claim by sharing information on the strain likely being a previously known mutation. Latest Monkeypox VFA content: Monkeypox explainer [[LINK](#)]

Key Covid-19 Misinformation Trends

~~Ivermectin has been proven effective against COVID-19.~~ Users have been sharing a "prospective observational study" that reportedly has shown that the use of Ivermectin as prophylaxis for COVID-19 has led to a 92% reduction in mortality rate in a dose response manner.

What to do: Engaging with prominent voices on social messaging apps is crucial as many voices have moved away from public social media platforms. Ivermectin VFA content: **Ivermectin explainer** [[LINK](#)]

Myths, Q&A, and facts

- ~~Smallpox vaccines causes AIDS.~~ [[Here](#), [Here](#)]
- Do I need to get tested for Covid-19 before getting the flu shot? [[Here](#), [Here](#)]
- How would I know if I have the flu or Covid-19? [[Here](#), [Here](#)]
- Can the flu cause a positive Covid-19 test result? [[Here](#), [Here](#)]
- Do I still need to take the flu vaccine if I have had the Covid-19 vaccine? [[Here](#), [Here](#)]
- Is it safe to get the flu jab and Covid-19 vaccine simultaneously? [[Here](#), [Here](#)]

PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RCCE

- Integrate the TB recovery plan into general health communication so that all members within the public sector, and the communities are aware of how this strategy will be realised.
- Drive a key message that no amount of political unrest should impact the work government has done in public health and to strengthen healthcare systems.
- Create a consolidated platform within the NDOH that has the latest scientific news around HIV/AIDS, TB, COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.
- Covid-19 and HIV/AIDS sensitisation training for all members of the public and parts of the private sector. It is important that the entire public and private sector is trained on the impact of Covid-19 as well the impact of HIV/AIDS in 2022/2023. Covid-19 integration into healthcare is a vital component of public health management.
- Integrate key healthcare information with general public administration and across different areas of the public sector including social development, SAPS, DBE, DOH and GCIS. Risk communication for health requires an integrated approach to manage effectively.
- Promote vaccinations at all levels of healthcare, including the uptake of the Polio, Measles, Rubella and HPV vaccine among the unvaccinated. Several smaller communicable disease outbreaks have been witnessed and the effective communication of preventative treatments, such as a vaccine, should be communicated.

- Conduct a risk analysis and update the vaccine SOP for those potentially vulnerable to any adverse effect caused by any vaccine. People with undiagnosed underlying conditions are at risk of developing side effects to any medical treatment. It is therefore vital that a risk analysis is conducted to determine who will benefit most from taking vaccines.
- Upskill the community healthcare workers, and work toward integrating CHW as a healthcare directorate. CHW are the “eyes on the ground” in terms of public health, and therefore requires a strengthening in terms of data sharing, impact analysis and public health alignment.
- Incorporate routine vaccination communication training within patient facing healthcare workers.
- Collaborate with church leaders, and traditional healers around vaccination programmes for routine vaccines. The more involved risk communication is with people facing societal functions, the better the reach of interventions.

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-19 contact centre:** Reports from the national call centre
- **Prækelt.Org:** NDOH Covid-19 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-19 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.

The drafting team this week includes Charity Bhengu (NDOH), Phelokazi Mgugeka & Herkulaas Combrink (UFS), and William Bird (Real 411). The data for this report was collected by NDOH, Real 411, HST, NICD and UFS. The report was reviewed by Nombulelo Leburu

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