

South Africa Covid-19 and Vaccine Social Listening Report 21 February 2022, Report 38

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This is a weekly report of Covid & vaccine sentiment, rumors & misinformation in SA.
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1. KEY TRENDS IN COVID & VACCINE SENTIMENT

Negative sentiment prevails on social media, with vaccine sceptics and vaccine hesitant people dominating the conversations on Twitter and negative sentiment more prevalent than positive sentiment, even though the volume of conversations has declined significantly. The top three drivers in volume are vaccine hesitancy, vaccine skepticism and fringe conspiracy theories. Read the full report [Here](#)

SAHPRA and Free the Children – Save the nation hearing on whether the decision to give children vaccines is lawful fuels anti-vaccine sentiments because SAHPRA failed to produce documents that support vaccines for children [Here](#)

Vaccine Mandates remain a cause of concern, with high numbers of social media conversations reported. People are divided on the enforcement of the vaccine mandate policies by Universities of Free State, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Anti-mandate sentiment was re-enforced by statement from Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng in ENCA interview that “forced or coerced vaccination for medical experiments are crimes against humanity.” [Here](#). Others said that business and institutions were within their rights to enforce their policies. Students at the Durban University of Technology were upset with the institution’s mandatory vaccination policy leading to a protest [Here](#).

Concerns that vaccines could increase risk of HIV infection October 2020 report on research suggesting that COVID-19 vaccines have the potential to increase the risk of HIV infection [Here](#) has gained traction amongst South Africans and emerged in Twitter conversations. There is also some discussion on the emergence of an HIV variant [Here](#) and [Here](#).

COVID-19 indifference Conversations on several online media highlighted demotivation to follow recommended protective behaviours over time. Moreover, the relaxation on some of the regulations may have pushed people to believe that Covid-19 no longer exists or is no longer dangerous. [Here](#) and [Here](#).

On-going EVDS problems: Covid-19 Hotline was inundated with calls related to gaps of information about vaccination records, vaccinations not loaded at the site, incorrect vaccines registered on site, and problems downloading vaccine certificates.

Vaccine production: Google trends show a slight increase in searches for the vaccine production plant. There is the potential for this topic to become viral if the correct information is not shared proactively. There were **negative response to WHO promoting SA vaccine production** [Here](#) .Some people question the credibility of the WHO. [Here](#) and [Here](#)

Mistrust of daily updates: Social media monitoring shows that some people mistrust the data and suspect that government manipulates information and officials are profiting from COVID. For example, the sharp increase of Covid-19 deaths from 8 to 435 within four days caused a stir [Here](#) and [Here](#) . Statements include “*making up figures to force them to vaccinate*”; “*we no longer seeing Coved funerals, 400 is too much*”; “*wonder if anyone is benefitting from these deaths*”

KZN concerns with negative sentiments about the likely fifth wave in winter and a rumour that it is fabricated to control people [Here](#) and [Here](#) and [Here](#) KZN launched the “*Let’s Play Sigomile: Sporting With The Legends*” vaccination programme which includes door-to-door visits to encourage more people to vaccinate [Here](#).

Alternative medicine and COVID-19 cures: Some social media discussion about billboard selling COVID-19 miracle cure on Pretoria highway. Someone questioned whether people know that colloidal silver causes can turn your skin blue” whereas vaccination continues an important intervention. [Here](#)

Moderna CEO ditches vaccines: News of the Moderna’s executive team dumping their stocks has caused quite a bit of speculation and concern online. “They are dumping stock like there is no tomorrow. Wonder what’s happening?” [Here](#) “They are saying it causes infertility, cancer and AIDS; I dodged the bullet” [Here](#)

1. DISTRICT REPORTS

- **Buffalo City (Eastern Cape).** Vaccination acceptance decreasing in the district but most of the senior people say they have vaccinated already and some see no need to vaccinate.
- **OR Tambo (Eastern Cape).** Improved vaccine acceptance among school learners. Most of those who chose not to vaccinate had no reason.
- **City of Johannesburg (Gauteng).** Vaccine intake increasing especially during the Zwakala Campaign week. Even people who came for HIV and TB testing also vaccinated since the services were conveniently located next to each other.
 - Undocumented people came in numbers without any problems.
 - Mobilization teams driving a high number of people to the school vaccination sites.
 - Vaccine uptake also increasing due to fear of hospitalization and death.
- **Ekurhuleni (Gauteng).** The overall vaccine acceptance is slowly increasing. Those who have not taken their 1st jab sees no need to vaccinate because they think Covid is over. Some of those who have are hesitant to take the 2nd jabs and booster shots. They believe they are protected already.
- **Harry Gwala (KZN).** Increasing vaccination among 12+ years olds because of the introduction of the sites at schools but some parents are still reluctant to sign the consent forms for their children.

- **Bojanala (North West).** Vaccination targets are not met for varied reasons; some want the vaccine to be brought to them rather than going to the CHC or faraway vaccination sites. Others still have doubts about vaccination. They say they will be vaccinated once they are forced to do so.
- **Khayelitsha, Western Cape:** Claims that people who vaccinated are testing positive for HIV/AIDS.
- **Cape Winelands (Western Cape).** Vaccine uptake is decreasing, partly due to less mobility because of heat wave.
- **Garden Route (Western Cape).** Few young people are vaccinating due to resistance to university vaccine mandates. Those who are over 50 years old are actively coming for their boosters.
- **Namaqua (Western Cape).** There are growing calls for mask wearing to be called off. Anti-vaxxers are unhappy about not being considered for employment because they are unvaccinated

2. MISINFORMATION

MISINFO: COVID vaccines and boosters give you HIV. **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim at all. Vaccines, including Covid-19 vaccines cannot cause AIDS / HIV or make us more susceptible to contracting this or any other virus. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: COVID cases are low so now we don't need to vaccinate. **TRUTH:** Having lower case numbers 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: 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: Vaccines have a tracker chip to track movement and shut you down if you misbehave. **TRUTH:** No evidence to support this claim. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: People are dying from the COVID vaccine, and the government is hiding how many deaths. **TRUTH:** There is no evidence of anyone dying in South Africa as a result of the vaccine. See [here](#). Most people who lost their lives to COVID in the 4th wave 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:** 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: Churches were closed during lockdown to enable the devil 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](#)

3. PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RCCE

- **Renew and refresh Covid communications.** Communicators should consider exploring what can be done to disseminate health information that remains fresh/palatable and how to shift the approach to meaningful information that overcomes the boredom of single issue communication. Consider focussing on what is important to individuals.
- **Strategic communications:** Continue to re-enforce the on-going relevance and importance of Covid-19 & vaccination

Public health / Risk Communications / Politics. Public health communications to focus more on what is important to individuals.

- **Refocused messaging:** Focus on high-risk groups by removing other ‘noises’ that are less relevant. E.g. Diabetes
- **More strategic collaborations:** As winter is approaching, need to be ready to respond to the likely new variant with more focus on community action.
- **Produce targeted COVID-19 communication with regard to the management of COVID-19.** This speaks directly to the benefit of having a vaccine production plantation within South Africa as this will address concerns related to vaccine apartheid and vaccine availability the public had
- **Create targeted communication related to vaccine mandates,** why they are important, and what are the associated risks.

AIRA Viral Facts Africa to debunk misinformation: There is an understated frustration in the public that has become significantly more vocal against Covid-19 vaccine. The following viral facts will help to **debunk** that *pandemic waves are not fabricated* [Here](#))

4. 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), 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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