

South Africa Covid-19 & Vaccine Social Listening Report

20 June 2022, Report 54

This is a weekly report of Covid-19 and vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA.

KEY TRENDS

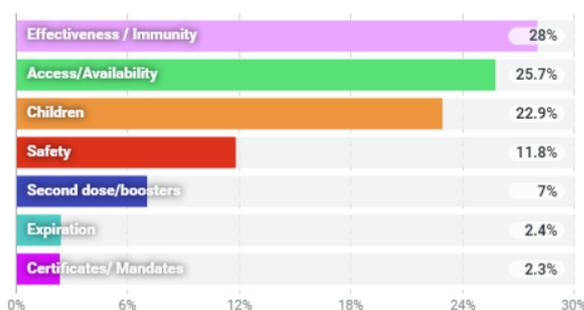
Monkeypox fear. There is ongoing concern on social media about monkeypox ([Here](#)). Monkeypox has not yet been detected in SA – this fear is being driven by online social media from other countries. However, this is being discussed less than earlier in this month. Many feel that the outbreak is human made and controlled ([Here](#)).

Covid exhaustion and doubt. There is considerably less discussion on Covid-19 than earlier this year, and many people express tiredness with it. *“I forgot about this thing”, “I thought this Covid19 is long gone, it’s really tiring now”*. “Covid is a hoax”. There are many reports from around the country that there is dwindling commitment to Covid regulations, and many businesses do not enforce health protocols such as mask wearing inside shops and malls.

Social media. Levels of engagement on Covid and vaccine on social media has been decreasing over the past month. Search trends: Interest in the following search queries was rising on Google over the past week: [Justin Bieber vaccine](#) (his Ramsay Hunter syndrome facial impairment being misunderstood as related to Covid vaccines), [EVDS](#) and “how do I get my vaccine certificate?”. Tweets about Covid-19 vaccines were down from the previous week, with 10,000 engagements in SA. The top relevant tweets were: [Western Cape schools vaccination sites](#), [World Bank approves R7.6 billion loan to SA](#), [Why young people should get the COVID jab](#). News articles about Covid-19 vaccines generated 6,400 engagements in SA (down 15% on the previous week). Top articles on digital news media by engagement include: [SA leen nóg R7,6 mjd. by Wêreldbank vir Covid-entstof](#), [COVID-19 | Pregnant women at higher risk of death](#), [World Bank approves R7.6 billion loan to SA](#), [CDC: 1,287,595 injury reports following Covid shots](#).

Online conversations about COVID-19 vaccines that generated most engagements in the past week were related to effectiveness and immunity (28%), access and availability (26%), children (23%) and safety (12%).

Share of engagement by vaccine subtopic, Twitter, digital news and selected Facebook channels, South Africa



Covid inequality. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected poorer people hardest in SA. There has been continued discussion of the analysis of over 400,000 Covid patients showed that inequality in South Africa influences who lives and who dies ([Here](#)). The African black population had a higher rate of Covid-19 infection, are more likely to die of Covid-19, but were less likely to get an Intensive Care bed. Covid-19 has reinforced patterns of inequality in South Africa.

Hostility to vaccination. Here are comments hostile to vaccination taken from social media pages of public health organisations: “Not interested in this vaccine”, “No thanks. You can have mine. Don't trust you or the jab.”, “NO! Geen jab vir my. Gaan weg!!”, “Natural immunity will do thanks”, “My dad had a mild heart attack 4 weeks after his 2nd vaccine, coincidence?? I think not.”, “Get a clue. You are just repeating the same bullshit you have been from the beginning. It does not work. That is a fact.” However, some are supportive of vaccination -, “It is wise to get vaccinated, it can literally save your life”

People not testing. There are reports that many people at work do not test for Covid-19 anymore, even with symptoms. Reasons include employees not feeling able to afford time off work to test so continues even though symptomatic; or employers requesting employees not to test due to disruption it causes to business, so employees work with symptoms in an office with others; or even an attitude of “If you're too stupid to vaccinate, it's not my problem if I give you Covid-19.”

BELA concern. There has been much discussion of the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (BELA), which is being interpreted to mean that children can be obliged to be vaccinated against Covid-19, with parents who resist possibly being jailed.

MISINFORMATION

~~**MISINFO:** Monkeypox is the new scam to trick and control us, just like Covid was, OR Monkeypox is the scam name for the side effects of the Pfizer Covid vaccine.~~ **TRUTH:** Covid vaccine have no relation to monkeypox (which has been around many years before Covid vaccines), and Covid vaccines do not have any live virus in them. Monkeypox is a viral disease and not an auto-immune disease, so it cannot be caused by a side effect of a vaccine. See [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Ivermectin is an effective treatment for Covid-19.~~ **TRUTH:** The SA Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) carried out a study into the use of Ivermectin and concluded that “there is currently no credible evidence to support a therapeutic role for Ivermectin in COVID-19”. SAHPRA therefore ended their trial early. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Pfizer's own data shows over 1,291 side effects of the Covid vaccine.~~ **TRUTH:** A report from 2021 did have a long list of potential side effects, but these were NOT side effects of their Covid vaccine. It was a list of potential side effects that the safety study was watching out for. The vaccine is safe and side effects are mostly mild. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines side effects are being under reported and can kill you. SA vaccine adverse effects reactions website shows how many have died!~~ **TRUTH:** Evidence does not support this claim, most side effect are mild and self-resolving. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). SA has excellent adverse reporting mechanisms backed by evidence ([here](#)) for credible local site on adverse reactions. The SA Health Products Regulatory Authority has conducted extensive research and determined that no one in SA has died due to the Covid vaccine ([Here](#)).

~~**MISINFO:** I have survived Covid for 2 years already so I don't need a vaccine now.~~ **TRUTH:** Getting vaccinated helps you reduce your chance of getting Covid-19 which is still highly contagious, prevents the spread of Covid to others, and helps to limit new variants emerging. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines cause infertility and erectile dysfunction.~~ **TRUTH:** There's no evidence to support these claims. However, Covid-19 however can impair sexual performance. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Covid booster vaccines are dangerous.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim. The Covid booster vaccines are the same drugs used in the previous injections. Boosters shots are normal practice with many forms of immunization. See [here](#) and [here](#).

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines are dangerous and now linked to “vaccine-acquired immunodeficiency syndrome” or “VAIDS”.~~ **TRUTH:** There is no evidence at all to support the claim of immunodeficiency being related to Covid-19 vaccines. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Covid vaccination requires long painful needles. **TRUTH:** Covid vaccination may cause slight pain, like a poke or pinch for only for a few seconds. Very long needles are not used. See [here](#) and [here](#) for tips and advice on managing fear and pain.

MISINFO: Vaccines contain a microchip to track movement and shut you down if you misbehave. **TRUTH:** This is not true. It is a common conspiracy theory, but there is no evidence to support this claim. 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 and vaccination. They produce the Viral Facts content responding to misinformation which can be used freely. Here are the latest [Viral Facts Africa](#) resources (please use them):

Here are the main points in their weekly infodemic trends report.

- **Key concerning Disease Trends:** Monkeypox is transmitted through clothing
- **Key COVID-19 Misinformation Trends:** COVID-19 vaccine causes myocarditis in children

The most recent **Viral Facts Africa** productions:

Explainer: Monkeypox ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))

Pfizer Covid vaccine cancer risk ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))

Malaria vaccine development ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))

Flu and Covid vaccines ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))

WHO in Africa has worked with the UK Government and Viral Facts Africa to create a new campaign to support Covid-19 vaccine demand across Africa. Building on the experience WHO and Viral Facts Africa have in countering the spread of health misinformation and disinformation in the African region, the UK Government has developed messaging based on insights and behavioural science expertise gained during the pandemic. These digital assets will help to build vaccine confidence by tackling the most prominent drivers of vaccine hesitancy and support Africa's recovery from the pandemic. The materials are [here](#).

PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Monkeypox reassurance.** On social media there is worry about monkeypox, although there is not an outbreak in SA. While there are no confirmed cases of monkeypox yet in SA, there is widespread concern. Accurate information should be disseminated explaining monkeypox and that it is not linked to Covid-19. AIRA materials can be adapted, available [here](#).
- **Most adults are vaccinated!** Over 50% of adults in SA have had at least one Covid vaccination. This is an important fact is establishing the social norm that vaccinating is the right thing to do. However, this is not widely known. This needs to be widely communicated, particularly in districts with low vaccine uptake, and in youth 18 – 34 years (the most vaccination hesitant age group).
- **The pandemic is not over yet.** New communication is required to underscore that the Covid pandemic has not ended, the importance of vaccination to avoid future waves of Covid-19 infections being more severe, reduce the chance of more dangerous variants evolving and decrease potential outbreaks of other diseases in the future. During winter vaccination is particularly important as much time is spent with people indoors.

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
- **Praekelt.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 RESOURCES

SA Corona virus website
Real 411 to report misinfo

[Here](#)
[Here](#)

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.

This week’s report was written by Peter Benjamin.

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