

South Africa Covid-19 & Vaccine Social Listening Report

1 August 2022, Report 60

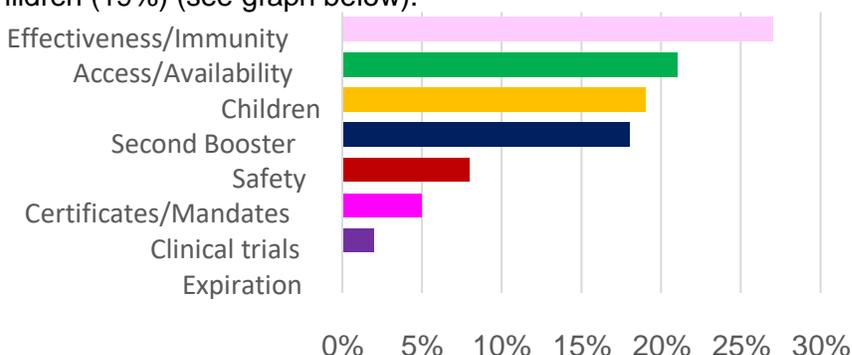
This is a weekly report of Covid-19 & vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Further information that provides the background to this report is available [here](#).

KEY TRENDS

“Covid is over” and dwindling interest in vaccination. There is widespread sentiment that Covid-19 is no longer a problem in SA and there are very low levels of vaccination currently. News that continuing boosters could be needed as *“immunity is not very long-lived”* ([Here](#)) has led to increasing resistance to continued vaccination ([Here](#)).

Poor vaccine coverage ythreatens measles outbreaks. South Africa’s vaccination rates were falling short even before the Covid-19 pandemic which has made the problem worse. There is growing concern that *“small measles outbreaks recently reported in Gauteng may be precursors to much larger outbreaks”* ([Here](#)). A recently survey found that only 76.8% of children surveyed had received all their required childhood vaccines. It is believed that the health system’s focus on Covid-19 has compromised services for other diseases. The pandemic has driven the largest drop in childhood vaccinations in 30 years, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations children’s charity UNICEF ([Here](#)).

Social media. This week there has been increasing interest in the following queries: “Covid vaccines available in South Africa” and “vaccines near me”. There have been fewer Tweets about Covid-19 in SA. The most shared links in tweets about Covid in SA included misinformation on vaccine mandates ([here](#)), fraudulent Covid vaccine certificates ([here](#)) and the Centaurus variant ([here](#)). The top news articles about Covid-19 in SA were about further booster shots ([here](#)), Solly Mapaila encouraging workers to vaccinate ([here](#)), US President Biden’s Covid illness ([here](#)), Corporate vaccine mandates ([here](#)) and Novak Djokovic ([here](#)). Online conversations on Twitter, Facebook and digital news in SA about Covid vaccines that generated most engagements in the past week were related to effectiveness and immunity (28%), access and availability (21%), and children (19%) (see graph below).



MISINFORMATION

~~**MISINFO:** An article in the New England Journal of Medicine shows that unvaccinated patients who have Covid-19 are less contagious than those vaccinated or boosted. **TRUTH:** This is not what the article ([here](#)) says – instead it reports that in a small sample, the researchers “did not find large differences” in viral shedding between vaccinated, boosted and unvaccinated people. There is clear evidence that vaccinated people are less likely to spread Covid ([here](#) and [here](#)).~~

~~**MISINFO:** People who have been vaccinated are more likely to get seriously ill from Covid-19. **TRUTH:** There is no evidence to support this claim. People who have been vaccinated are far less likely to experience severe symptoms. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).~~

~~**MISINFO:** Big banks and insurers have cancelled their compulsory vaccine mandate for employees because the vaccines don't work. **TRUTH:** Standard Bank and several other companies have cancelled vaccine mandates. Standard says over 90% of all their staff are vaccinated so there is no need for compulsory vaccination. There's also been pressure from trade unions to end vaccine mandates. This is not about vaccines not working. See [here](#) and [here](#).~~

~~**MISINFO:** Now that Covid regulations been dropped there is no need to get vaccinated. **TRUTH:** With the Covid regulations ending, vaccination is even more important. Covid-19 is still widespread and killing people every day. Vaccination is the main way to protect yourself and your family. It's still recommended to wear masks in indoor public spaces and to ventilate rooms. See [here](#) and [here](#).~~

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

~~**MISINFO:** Monkeypox is just the new Covid-19 scam to control and or kill us OR monkeypox is the scam name for the side effects of the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine. **TRUTH:** Monkeypox is a viral disease and not an auto-immune disease, so it cannot be a side effect of a vaccine and the vaccines do not have any live virus in them. Monkeypox is not new but recently has mutated to be more contagious and has spread to SA. See [here](#) and [here](#).~~

~~**MISINFO:** Monkey Pox and Chicken Pox are the same thing and are being used to spread fear. **TRUTH:** The viruses are different: Monkeypox is an orthopoxvirus ([here](#)), while chickenpox is a herpes virus ([here](#)). Monkeypox is similar to smallpox. See [here](#) and [here](#).~~

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines side effects are being under reported and can kill you. The SA Adverse reactions site shows how many have died! **TRUTH:** This is false. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). SA has excellent adverse event reporting mechanisms backed by evidence (see [here](#) for a credible local site on adverse reactions). The SA Health Products Regulatory Authority has conducted research and found that no one in SA has died due to Covid-19 vaccines ([Here](#)).~~

~~**MISINFO:** Vaccines are dangerous and are 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:** The only reason government is still pushing Covid vaccines is because they want to get rid of old stock. **TRUTH:** Getting vaccinated is important to help limit variants developing and help prevent you and those close to you from getting seriously ill. Please ensure you are vaccinated. See [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”. They therefore ended the trial early. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Text message saying “You have participated in a Covid drug trial and will get paid” ... if you do something. **TRUTH:** These sorts of messages are scams. Legitimate clinical trials never send random text message to people who didn’t know they were in a trial. See [here](#) for all the policies followed locally and [here](#) for information about informed consent.

MISINFO: Garlic, sage, essential oils or muthi are better at prevention and curing Covid than vaccines. **TRUTH:** While some use essential oils and garlic to regain smell there is no evidence to support claim that they can prevent people getting Covid or curing it. See [here](#) and [here](#).

MISINFO: Covid vaccines require the use of long painful needles. **TRUTH:** Covid vaccines may cause slight pain, like a poke or pinch, for only for a few seconds. See [here](#) and [here](#) for advice on managing fear and pain.

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](#)) with African infodemic trend reports [here](#).

Key Monkeypox Misinformation Trends

- PHEIC is a WHO Political Strategy
- Chickenpox exposure/vax is effective against monkeypox

Key COVID-19 Misinformation Trends

- COVID-19 Vaccine Causes Long-COVID

Recent Viral Facts Africa productions:

- Explainer: Marburg virus ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))
- Mythbuster: Monkeypox is a side-effect of Covid-19 vaccines ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))
- Explainer: Western Anti-vaxxers targeting Africa ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#))

Gavi, the global vaccine alliance vaccine confidence resource pack ([Here](#))

PROPOSED ACTION FOR RISK COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Wider health issues: Increase communication on vaccine preventable diseases such as measles and monkeypox. This includes aligning risk communications and community engagement efforts, including social listening, to the growing concern of other infectious diseases. “Anti-vaxx” sentiments about Covid vaccinations have hurt the uptake of other life-saving immunizations.

Focus on undocumented. Many undocumented people, both SA and foreign, are unvaccinated for Covid and other diseases. Information on the benefits and availability of vaccines should be widely communicated to them, including working with organisation for migrants and refugees.

Healthcare workers' vaccine confidence skills. Providing information and training to health professionals including community health workers on the importance and safety of Covid and other vaccines can build vaccine confidence. This should include advice for communicating with vaccine-resistant people.

Focus on the marginalised. There is still unmet demand for Covid vaccination, especially in informal settlements and remote rural areas. Providing vaccination services combined with community mobilisation with trusted local leaders has been effective in many areas.

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:** The national call centre
- **Praekelt.Org:** NDOH Covid-19 WhatsApp system
- **WHO Africa Infodemic Response Alliance (AIRA)**
- **UNICEF:** digital analysis of social & digital media
- **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-19 Comms:** a network of communications specialists producing 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

Background info for this report [Here](#)
SA Corona virus website [Here](#)
Real 411 to report misinfo [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, 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.

Contributors to this report through inputs and participating in the weekly prioritization meeting: NDOH, Free State DOH, KZN DOH, NICD, UNICEF, Real411, University of Free State, Right To Care, Project Last Mile, Community Constituency Forum, Health Systems Trust, DG Murray Trust, and Covid Comms.

This week's drafting team: Herkulaas Combrink, Charity Bhengu, William Bird and Peter Benjamin.

Contact:

Nombulelo Leburu, National Department of Health
Peter Benjamin, HealthEnabled
Charity Bhengu, National Department of Health

nombulelo.leburu@health.gov.za 082 444 9503
peter@healthenabled.org 082 829 3353
charity.bhengu@health.gov.za 083 679 7424