

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

**11-18 May 2023**

**(Weekly brief #72)**

# Top trends

## [Little concern by African online users following the end of mpox as a Public Emergency of International Concern \(PHEIC\).](#)

The news generated a relatively low engagement online from African users, which resembles past trends of a low risk perception across the continent.

## [Trends to watch](#)

Pupils fear vaccination in Malawian school

Mozambican citizen was beaten to death for fear of spreading cholera

Rumors about a new COVID-19 outbreak

Mumps disease outbreak in South Africa

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## **Public Health Infodemic Trends in the African Region**

This weekly report provides key highlights and operational recommendations based on social listening data from May 11-18 in Africa.

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## Little concern by African online users following the end of mpox as a Public Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)

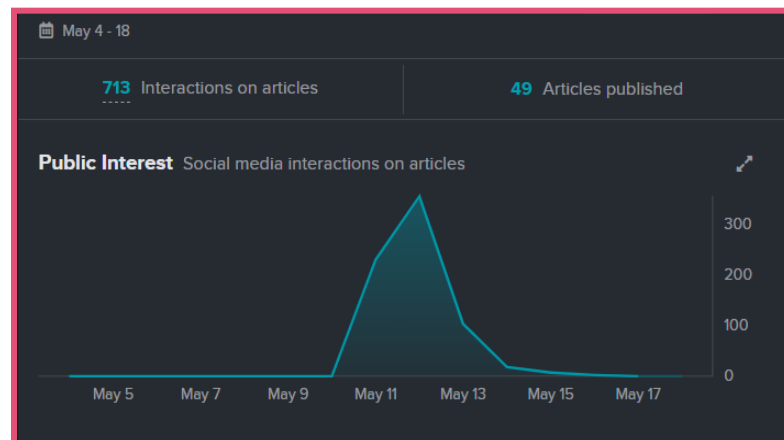
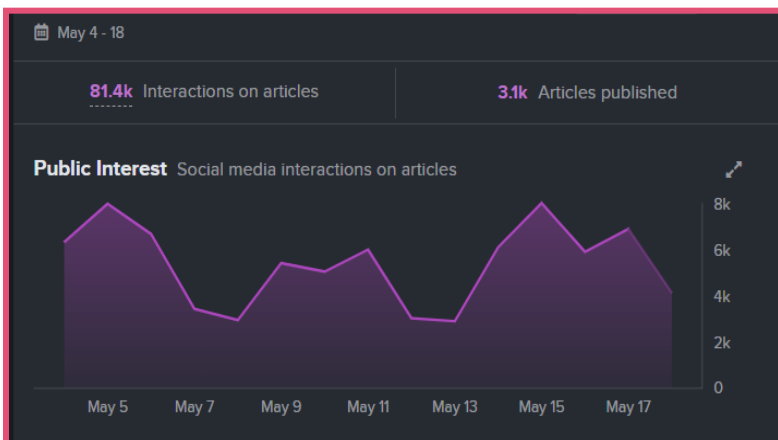
**CONTEXT:** During the [fifth meeting](#) on May 10th of the International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee regarding the multi-country outbreak of mpox, the WHO Director-General determined that a long-term would better address mpox challenges rather than the emergency measures inherent to a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).



**Engagement:** 35 posts, 2k likes, 688 comments

### Summary

- The level of engagement on mpox and on all social media posts has been low compared to other outbreaks in Africa and compared to other regions. Comments scanned since the beginning of the mpox pandemic show that African online users are not as concerned about the mpox outbreak and believe it causes a minimal threat to the populations in Africa.
- Below are two graphs comparing the level of interest of social media users for COVID-19 from May 4 to 18th (left) and mpox from May 4 to 18th (right) in Africa. Both graphs have been sourced from NewsWhip.



- Aside from social listening updates from African media channels, mis & disinformation about mpox and the WHO have also circulated.

- This included claims that mpox [wasn't a PHEIC from the start](#), claims that it was [a ploy created by the WHO](#) and claims that Dr. Tedros is not a medical doctor but a [member](#) of the global terrorist database since the 90's. The dissemination of dis and misinformation extends beyond the comments on posts shared by international news agencies and also targeted public health experts' social media posts.

### Why is it concerning?

- According to an [article](#) by Nature, one of the most prestigious scientific journals, there are international concerns from researchers regarding the decision to no longer classify mpox as a PHEIC, specifically that vital resources might be diverted away from efforts to control the ongoing outbreak, which [remains prevalent](#) globally.
- Mpox is endemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Ghana. According to [the weekly bulletin on outbreaks and other emergencies](#) from April 24-30, Africa has had a 7.4% case increase in mpox cases, with 111 new cases between April 10 and April 24, with the DRC, Nigeria and Ghana accounting for most cases. This highlights the importance of sustained efforts to combat the disease and prevent further spread.

### What can we do?

- WHO issued temporary recommendations in the 2022-2023 mpox Strategic Preparedness and Response [2022-2023 mpox Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan](#) including:
  - Additional efforts by countries in West, Central and East Africa where mpox is endemic to elucidate mpox-related risk, vulnerability, and impact and to investigate, understand and control mpox in their respective settings, including the consideration of zoonotic, sexual, and other modes of transmission in different demographic groups.
  - The investment in risk communication and community support and engagement for affected communities and at-risk groups, including through health authorities and civil society.
  - The implementation of interventions to avoid stigma and discrimination against any individuals or group that may be affected by mpox.

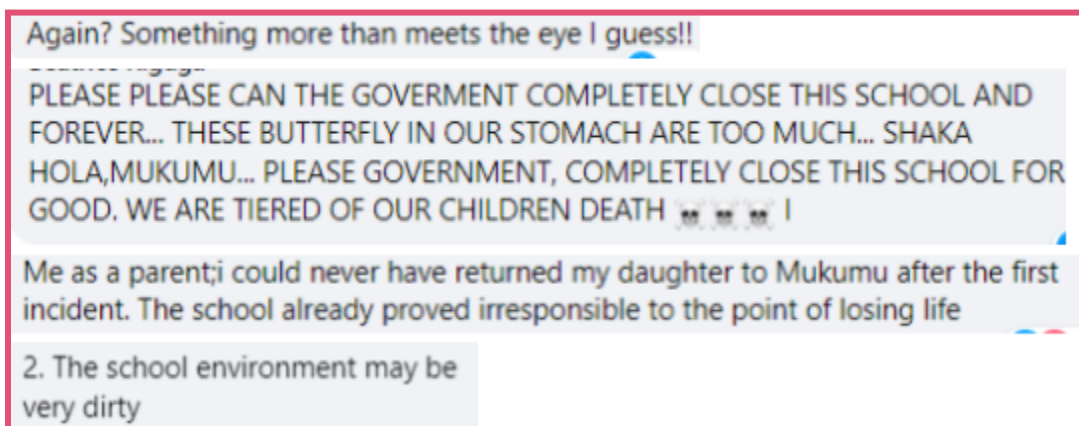
- The support and enhancement of access to diagnostics, vaccines, and therapeutics to advance global health equity, in particular for most affected communities worldwide, including gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men, with special attention to those most marginalized within those groups, and in resource-constrained countries where mpox is endemic.
- Continuous monitoring of the mpox conversations in Africa is important to spot any concern or misinformation around the disease and address any questions.

## Persistent trends

### Another disease outbreak at Mukumu Girls High School in Kenya

- Kenyan online news agencies such as [Citizen TV Kenya](#), [Tuko.Co.Ke](#), [KTN News Kenya](#), [Standard Kenya](#) have recently covered the news of students at Mukumu Girls in Western Kenya being diagnosed with malaria, while others have been experiencing abdominal pains.
- Notably, Nation, a leading news agency and media company in Kenya, shared a Facebook [post](#), which attracted the attention of 2.5k users on May 13th.
- Many online users expressed their frustration about the return of another outbreak at the school and demanded its closure so that no more incidents occur.
- In April, a disease outbreak at Mukumu Girls in Kakamega County was linked to the [contamination of water](#) at the institution, causing typhoid fever and amebiasis, and one case of cholera among the students.
- Parents are deeply concerned about their children attending Mukumu Girls High school, and frustration is mounting which is visible through online comments.

Below are some of their statements:



## Trends to watch

### Pupils fear vaccination in Malawian school

- The Ministry of Health in Malawi recently launched an [immunization campaign](#) targeting Typhoid, Measles, Rubella, and Polio. The campaign took place at Mtaya Primary School in Balaka district. Local [news agencies](#), including Zodiak Online, widely covered the news.
- However, a recent Facebook [post](#) shared on May 16th highlighted misinformed views about vaccine efficacy. According to Zodiak Online, some students at Mphande Primary School in Mwanza, located about 100 km from Balaka, refused to undergo the integrated immunization and fled the campus.
- The post also mentioned “a lack of awareness leading to misunderstandings about the importance of immunization.” It is concerning to see comments from online users expressing vaccine hesitancy, and accusing them of harming children.
- Some comments even propagate disinformation, alleging that vaccines are dangerous, with claims of the World Health Organization being a controlling agency inserting nanoparticles into people's bodies through vaccines.
- Furthermore, references to COVID-19 vaccines have also been observed, suggesting a hidden agenda “that went along with COVID vaccination” and labeling it as an organized crime. Here are some comments translated from Chichewa:

You health officials ,you have to involve teachers in vaccine briefing because a learner always listen to his/her teacher.Otherwise it ends with landslide 🙏🙏

Remember the covid jabs?

Recent investigations have reviewed some HIDDEN AGENDA that went along with the Covid vaccination

When you finish this vaccination, give us another vaccination so that we don't eat it?? We have had enough of this

The WORLD HEALTH Organisation is privately owned by a VERY FEW ELITE who have now wanted to control everyone in the world by planting Nano particles in people's bodies by use of VACCINATIONS. RECENT INVESTIGATIONS HAVE PROVED THIS,so when people are Sceptical of Vax don't be surprised

## Mozambican citizen was beaten to death for fear of spreading cholera

- News about the death of a Mozambican citizen beaten to death in Gúruè, Northern Mozambique was highlighted by two Mozambican online media websites. [Justiça Nacional](#), a Mozambican page dedicated to the publication of accurate information on the country's political and social affairs, and [Jornal Diário da Zambézia](#), a daily publication that covers news and current affairs in the Zambézia province, as well as national and international news.
- The man was beaten to death by members of the community who accused him of spreading cholera and held the position of a supervisor in the mosquito net distribution campaign.
- However, with the emergence of cases of diarrhea and vomiting in the area, the local population falsely believed that the victim was responsible for "spreading" cholera, which ultimately resulted in the loss of his life.
- Online users expressed their blame toward local authorities in Mozambique for their lack of prioritization to educate the population and foster awareness, highlighting a prevailing atmosphere of distrust among commentators.
- Users expressed how challenging it is for the public to place trust in the government. Below are some comments translated from Portuguese:

When a government is poorly behaved, the people are also not well educated.

Yes no one is to blame . but there are reasons for this distrust. If the people lose confidence in their government, everything they do will be the target of

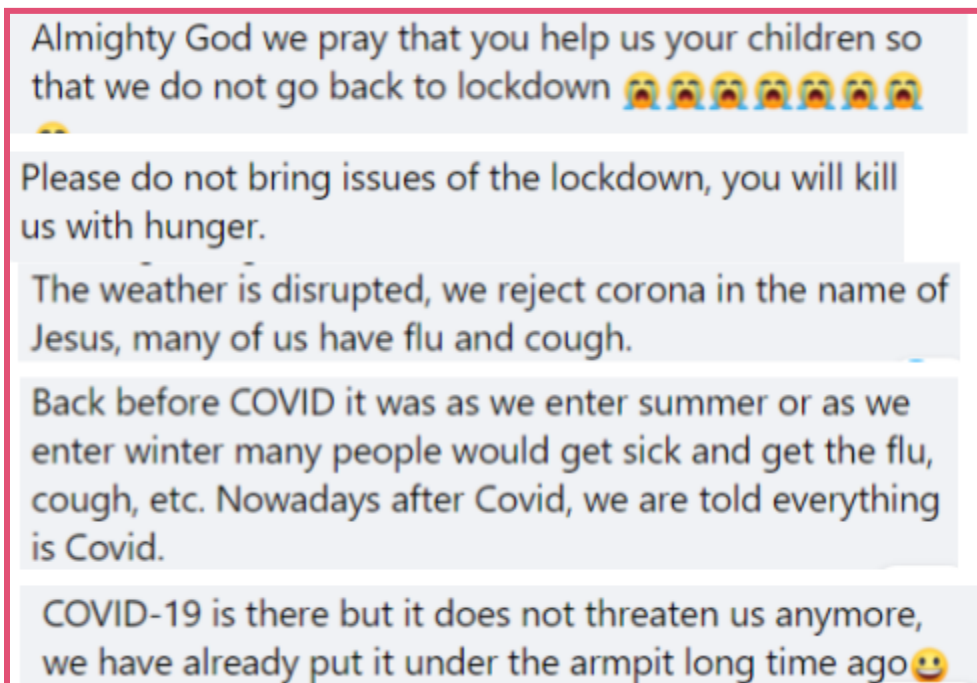
The fault lies with those who should instruct their people to know a little more about what goes around them. The

## Rumors about a new COVID-19 outbreak

### Tanzania

- The minister of Health, Umy Mwalimu, addressed [rumors of a new COVID-19 outbreak in Tanzania](#), urging citizens to remain calm.

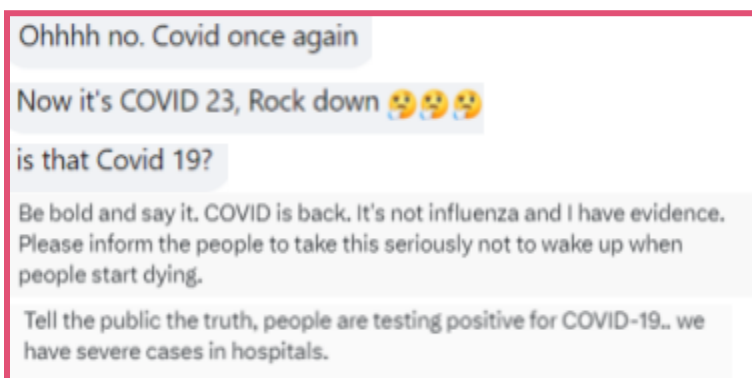
- The Ministry of Health is currently collecting information from hospitals and centers and will provide an update on any increase in cases by the end of this week.
- The Minister emphasized the importance of following health and hygiene guidelines related to COVID-19.
- Millard Ayo, a radio and television presenter, as well as a popular Tanzanian social media influencer with more than 3.2M followers, shared the minister's statement on his social media handles [[Twitter](#), [FB](#)].
- Online users commenting on Millard Ayo's Facebook post expressed concerns about the possibility of a lockdown and speculated that the recent surge in flu cases in Tanzania might be attributed to the winter season. Additionally, that COVID-19 does not pose a significant threat anymore. Below are some comments translated from Swahili;





## Uganda

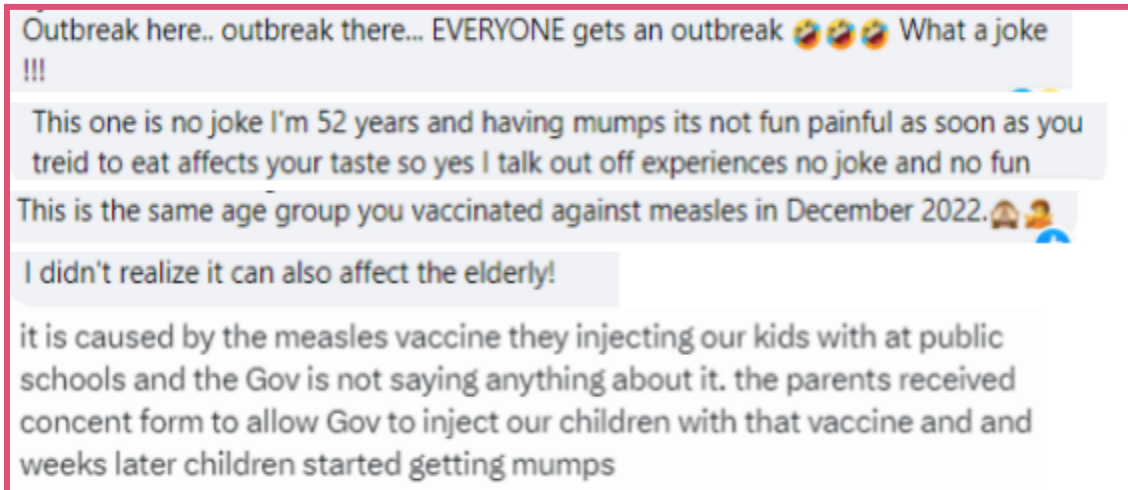
- The Ugandan Ministry of Health released a [statement](#) on May 12th via Twitter, alerting the public about a wave of a viral influenza during the rainy season.
- The Ministry confirmed that there was “no evidence of a resurgence of COVID-19 in the country.”
- However, some online users criticized the local authorities for not disclosing the truth about the new wave and speculated that it might actually be a resurgence of COVID-19. Others expressed their concerns about a potential wave of COVID-19 in Uganda, associating symptoms such as cough with the possibility of COVID-19 infections.
- The Daily Monitor newspaper prominently highlights this statement on its front page.
- Concerns were shared by online users commenting on the Ministry’s tweet and the Facebook [post](#) of Radio West 100.2 FM, a radio station based in Mbarara district of Uganda. Below are a few comments:



## Mumps outbreak in South Africa

- The National Department of Health in South Africa confirmed on the 12th of May on Facebook a [mumps outbreak](#) showing a steady increase in positive tests in different parts of the country including KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and Gauteng.

- Conversations by online users shared across 30 Facebook posts (including bloggers, medical experts, and online news agencies) have been monitored.
- The themes identified from these conversations included questions about the [nature of the virus](#) and [which age groups are affected](#), concerns that the measles vaccine may have [caused](#) the mumps outbreak, and complaints from parents who have been infected with mumps.
- Some parents displayed a lack of knowledge about whether the disease can affect the elderly.



- While there has been a surge of disinformation from South African social media users and disinformation groups regarding in-country outbreaks such as measles, and malaria, previously reported in AIRA reports, the conversations about mumps contained no disinformation.
- According to the NICD's [report](#) on vaccine information for parents and caregivers, there are two formulations of the measles vaccine available in South Africa; the single vaccine and the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine.

## Key resources

### Mpox

- [Social media toolkit](#) with all recent Viral Facts videos on mpox (ENG, FR).
- [WHO](#), 2022-2023 mpox Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan.
- [WHO](#), 2022-2023 mpox Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, operational planning guidelines.
- [Q&A](#) on ending mpox as a global health emergency
- [Q&A](#) on mpox

- [WHO's Science in 5](#) : Public Health Emergency of International Concern
- [WHO](#), What's a public health emergency of international concern?

## **Malaria**

- WHO [initiative](#) to stop the spread of Anopheles stephensi in Africa
- Viral Facts videos on Anopheles stephensi in Africa ([ENG](#), [FR](#)).
- WHO Malaria fact [sheet](#)
  
- Malaria threat [map](#)
- Malaria Social & Behavior Change Communication National [Strategies](#)

## **Mumps**

- WHO mumps fact [sheet](#)
- CDC-reviewed [Q&A](#) materials on mumps
- [NICD](#), Vaccine information for parents and caregivers in South Africa

## **Methodology**

The social media listening process relies on a combination of social media analyses conducted for French, English, and Lusophone-speaking countries.

The social media analysis for French-speaking countries is conducted by the AIRA Infodemic Manager Consultant based in Guinea, the one for Lusophone-speaking countries by the AIRA Infodemic Manager Consultant based in Angola, and the one for English-speaking countries by a WHO AFRO social media officer.

The final report is a combination of the three analyses and recommendations.

The shift from a social media listening monitoring conducted by only one person for the whole African region into a combined one based on the analysis conducted by three different people may result in a less detailed and exhaustive report.

Engagements, otherwise known as interactions, **refer to the number of likes, comments, reactions, and re-shares on a post.**

This is not a perfect measure of engagement:

- Some may have seen the post and chosen not to interact with it;
- Commenting on or re-sharing a post may constitute a more meaningful form of engagement than simply reacting to it;
- We are not systematically distinguishing between the types of responses that each engagement generates (e.g. while a post may contain misinformation, people may be countering/ debunking it in the comments).

We seek to mitigate these limitations by:

- Scanning comments and monitoring reactions to qualitatively evaluate responses to each post;
- Assessing the velocity of a post (i.e. how fast is it obtaining reactions, likes, and shares) and the re-emergence of specific themes;
- Identifying whether the post is shared across a variety of platforms and sources (broad engagement), or simply soliciting a high level of attention within a given community/ platform (siloes engagement).

The monitoring reports are produced using NewsWhip Analytics, Crowdtangle, Google Trends, and UNICEF Talkwalker dashboards as well as the WHO EPI-WIN weekly infodemic insight reports and the WHO EARS platform.

As a result, data may be biased towards data emerging from formal news outlets/ official social media pages and does not incorporate content circulating on closed platforms (e.g. Whatsapp) or groups (e.g. private Facebook groups).

We also rely on our fact-checking partners, who provide invaluable insights into relevant national and regional trends or content, as well as country-level reports, including the South Africa Social Listening Weekly Report and the Mali Social Listening Weekly Report.

In producing these summaries and recommendations, we have consulted community feedback survey reports, as well as monitoring and recommendations from AIRA partners. We also draw from WHO EPI-WIN weekly reports and UNICEF monthly reports to formulate recommendations. As we produce more content, we seek to triangulate and corroborate information across these groups to strengthen our infodemic response.