

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

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AIRA Infodemic Trends Report  
25-31 May 2023  
(Weekly brief #74)

## Top trends

### [Users react to expiration of Pfizer vaccines in South Africa](#)

South African users raised concerns and worries about the usability of Pfizer vaccines after they reach their expiration date.

### [Cholera outbreak in South Africa](#)

Reviews of media coverage of South Africa's cholera outbreak indicate a lack of trust in healthcare facilities and local authorities and concern about access to safe water by local residents.

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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 25-31 in Africa.

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## South Africa

### Online users react to the expiration of Pfizer vaccines in South Africa

**CONTEXT:** A local South African news agency called *The Citizen*, recently [reported](#) that pharmaceutical company Pfizer is expected to submit an application to the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (Sahpra) in early June. The purpose is to request an extension for the expiry dates on a significant batch of seven million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine.

**Engagement:** 13 posts, 874 likes, 334 comments

- The Facebook [post](#) by eNCA news regarding the expiry of more than 7.6 million Pfizer vaccines has attracted diverse reactions from online users.
- Some users expressed that the funds allocated for Pfizer vaccines should have been utilized to address pressing issues such as electricity shortages in the country.
- Other users voiced that the procurement of COVID-19 vaccination served as an indirect tactic to compel citizens into getting vaccinated. Furthermore, some users proudly claimed to have abstained from receiving the vaccines, accompanied by assertions that Bill Gates and conspiracy theorists will use new tactics to depopulate the world.
- Below are some comments shared on Facebook:

Yeses!! That money should have been used to service Eskom power stations

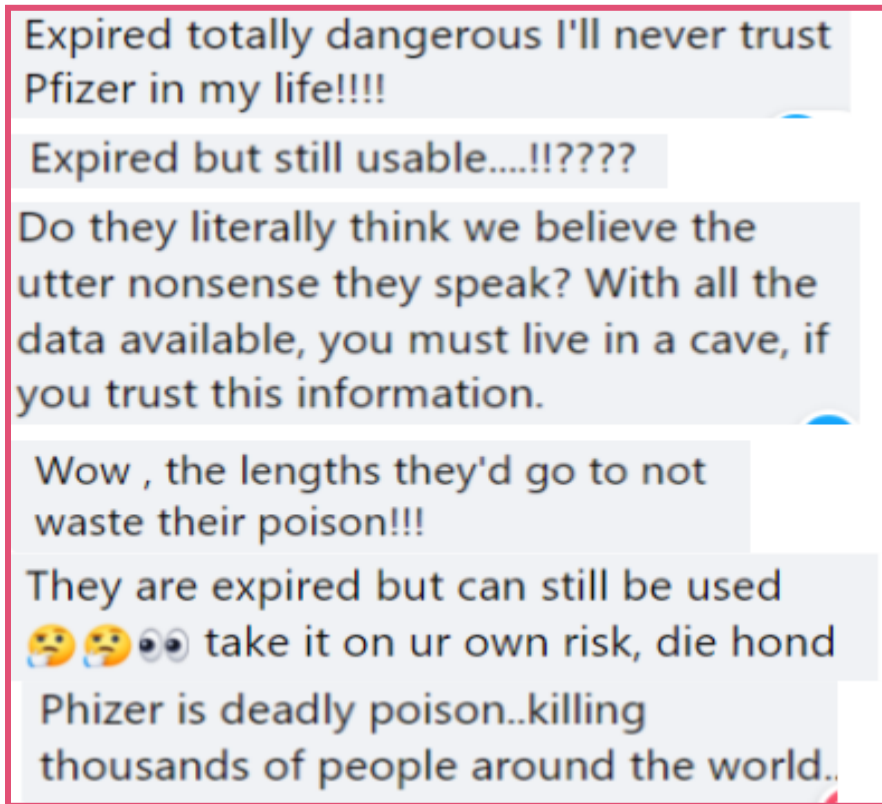
Proof that our presidency is incompetent. Buying lot of vaccines just to indirectly force citizens against their will for doses. We fought as anti-vaccine, government couldn't hear us instead it used our companies to threaten us with our jobs.

I think i contributed to that 7 million. Never been vaccinated 🤔👉. Meanwhile others have living devices in their bodies and are monitored everyday 🙄

Three years later I still say I will never take any COVID19 vaccine, very great feeling I tell you.

Bill gates and the nwo are gonna use other tactics to depopulate the world

- eNCA's recent posts about the Pfizer vaccine's [expiry](#) and the importance of vaccinating [citizens](#) against COVID-19 have raised concerns in the online community regarding the usability of the vaccines after they reach their expiration date. Users expressed worry about the effectiveness and safety of the vaccines once they are declared expired.
- Below are some comments:



### Why is it concerning?

- As the COVID-19 pandemic enters a non-emergency phase, there is a possibility that some online users may lose interest in receiving a vaccination, especially when faced with the prospect of receiving vaccines that have already expired.
- Claims previously circulated in South Africa, alleging that pharmaceutical company Pfizer [falsified](#) the efficacy testing of its Covid-19 vaccine. Furthermore, with the ongoing concerns surrounding the usability of Pfizer vaccines that have already expired, the impact on the company's credibility to South Africans becomes even more significant. It is important to note that the initial claim was later subjected to a fact-check conducted by [Africa Check](#).
- In a previous AIRA [report](#), South Africa's anti-vax group, FASA, called for an urgent judicial review of "Pfizer's mRNA COVID vaccine products" and

suggested that it be removed from the market. This news is likely to trigger their attention as anti-vax groups have a significant impact on their adoption of vaccines in South Africa. This was visible in a previous AIRA [report](#) as well.

### What can we do?

- During this phase, it's important to start rebuilding trust in routine vaccination. From an infodemic perspective, rebuilding trust can help mitigate vaccine hesitancy and promote transparency with health systems.
- Monitor any potential reactions related to the expiration of Covid-19 vaccines within disinformation groups to debunk and clarify any disinformation.

## South Africa

### Cholera outbreak in South Africa

**CONTEXT:** *Reviews of media coverage of South Africa's cholera outbreak indicate a lack of trust in healthcare facilities and local authorities, as well as concerns about access to safe water.*

**Engagement:** **29 posts, 3k likes, 1k comments**

#### Lack of trust in healthcare facilities and local authorities

- During an [interview](#) with eNCA news, a trusted South African channel with more than 2.5M followers on its social media platforms, a resident from the cholera-affected community of Hammanskraal in South Africa expressed her fear of going to Jubilee District Hospital.
- The resident voiced her apprehension about seeking medical assistance at the hospital. She claimed that healthcare professionals are ill-prepared to adequately respond to the ongoing cholera crisis, that there aren't enough beds for patients to seek care, and that the hospital has not been supplied with updated equipment.
- Comments from online users largely support her assertion. They reaffirm their distrust in local authorities' ability to effectively respond to the ongoing cholera outbreak—a sentiment that echoes the findings reported in previous AIRA [reports](#) about other outbreaks in South Africa (including measles).
- Below are some comments:

This government's incompetence is killing us for sure.

#VoteWisely2024

In 🇿🇦 you actually go to government hospitals to die - they are disgusting, sickening cesspools- that can definitely not be referred to as hospitals !!

Jubilee Hospital has been failing us for a very long time...nothing will get better anytime soon. POOR SERVICE EVER!!!

- Similarly, another [article](#) published by The Citizen News, a highly regarded news outlet in South Africa with 252k followers, further substantiates the prevailing lack of trust in healthcare facilities. The Facebook article reads **"Toddler Endures Hours of Waiting at Jubilee Hospital as Condition Deteriorates."**
- In a recent Facebook [post](#) by eNCA on May 30th, social media users reacted to the confirmation of two additional cholera cases in the North West. Some users raised concerns about the emergence of cholera alongside the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, questioning the severity of cholera compared to COVID-19. Others expressed frustration towards local authorities and blamed them for mismanaging both the COVID-19 pandemic and cholera outbreak.

😞 Corona is back it's comes another way

Another way of trying to depopulate us since their Corona strategy failed

So this year it's cholera vele..so it's stronger than covid??

Like Reply 1h



- In a TikTok [video](#) shared by CapeTalk, Cape Town's leading "News & Talk Station" with a substantial following of 29.7K, the host, John Maytham, expressed his frustration regarding the ongoing cholera outbreak. He highlighted that information gaps about the origins of the outbreak fueled the spread of misinformation. More specifically, that the owners of water tankers may have intentionally introduced cholera as a means to gain profit.



- Numerous online users who commented on the video emphasized that they no longer find anything surprising in South Africa.

Anything is possible in South Africa. Absolutely nothing surprises me anymore.

It's possible, look at Eskom power-stations just maintained following week another breakdown. So obviously people is making money from others hardships.

I can believe that.... I actually thought about it. It's possible  
We've been through too much to no longer be surprised

#### Concern about access to safe water

- Online users who commented on a Facebook [post](#) by the Ministry of Health in South Africa expressed their concerns regarding the poor-quality potable water, while others shared misinformation that local authorities are using contaminated water to depopulate South Africa. Below are some comments:

Sewage plant finances need to be investigated and all outflows tested. The root cause will probably be ground or surface water contamination.

They see their vaccine is no longer taken seriously, they using contaminated water to depopulate our people.

In the mean time what happens to the grade R child who is thirsty and doesn't have access to clean water. Taps are running same contaminated water

~~because~~ because African leaders are stealing the money meant to purify water

- Newzroom Afrika, a South African TV news channel with 606k followers on Facebook, shared a [video](#) on May 26th reporting that cholera has been detected in water samples taken from the Vaal River, the third largest river in South Africa, in the region of Parys in the Free State province.

- Another [article](#) by 2oceansvibe, a popular online news and lifestyle publication with 17k followers on Facebook, corroborates the rapid spread of the disease and the polluted water in the Apies River - Hammanskraal's main water source. "This is caused by the [failure](#) of the Rooiwal wastewater treatment works to meet the desirable final effluent quality for discharge to the Apies River".

### Why is it concerning?

- Conversations surrounding cholera in South Africa have surpassed those pertaining to diphtheria and mumps, indicating a heightened level of attention and concern regarding cholera in the country.
- Distrust in local health providers can significantly heighten the risk of individuals seeking appropriate and timely healthcare from qualified experts. This can have concerning implications if people resort to self-cures or rely on unverified remedies, potentially exacerbating the severity of cholera cases and hindering effective containment and prevention efforts.

### What can we do?

- Amplify fact-based information about cholera [explaining](#) symptoms after infection, and disseminate it in the trusted channels for each audience.
- Share further communication resources such as the Viral Facts Africa social media toolkit on [cholera](#). The kit includes Q&A explainers about the cholera outbreaks in Africa and an explainer on the cholera vaccine.

## Trends to watch

### Crimean Congo hemorrhagic fever in Namibia

- Online users engaging with a Facebook [post](#) by NBC Digital News, a prominent Namibian news outlet with a sizable digital following exceeding 394k, voiced their concerns regarding the absence of information pertaining to the symptoms of the disease, preventive measures, and its specific name.
- Commenters questioned the rationale behind publicizing the outbreak if it stemmed from a single infection, seeking clarity on the decision-making process.
- Below are some of the users' comments:



hazardous virus. This virus clearly comes from Congo, given the name, how is it that a person from Omaheke got it, and not someone from the North? Northern Namibia would be nearest to Congo. How did it get here? Which animals could possibly be the host of this virus?

Prevention measures?

Why named Congo??

1 person vs an outbreak?

### **Authorities in Angola rule out cholera cases in Cazenga, Luanda**

- According to an [article](#) published on the website of the national radio of Angola, “Despite the lack of basic sanitation, authorities in Cazenga, one of the municipalities that make up the province of Luanda, reaffirm that there are no cases of cholera in the municipality.”
- According to the head of the local Public Health Section, there are isolated cases of diarrheal diseases.
- In an [article](#) by Novo Jornal, a popular Angolan newspaper, concerned residents

have voiced their complaints regarding the absence of fundamental sanitation measures and the unsanitary conditions in their neighborhoods. The accumulation of garbage, particularly problematic during the rainy season, has become a significant issue.

## **Key resources**

### **Cholera**

- Cholera [social kit](#) VFA
- SPRP [link](#)
- World Health Assembly: [Q&A cholera](#)
- [Call](#) for urgent and collective action to fight cholera
- Cholera emergency [page](#)

- Global Task Force on Cholera Control Cholera [roadmap](#)

## **Crimean-Congo**

- Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever [WHO](#) fact sheet

## **COVID-19**

- [WHO](#), What's the difference between a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and a pandemic?
- [Social media toolkit](#) with all recent Viral Facts videos on COVID-19 (ENG, FR).
- [WHO](#), 2023-2025 COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan.
- [WHO](#), Preparedness and Resilience for emerging threats.
- [Q&A](#) on ending COVID-19 as a global health emergency
- [WHO's Science in 5](#) : Public Health Emergency of International Concern
- [WHO](#), What's a public health emergency of international concern?

## **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, or 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 (siloeed 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.