

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

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AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

8-15 August 2023

(Weekly brief #84)

Top concerns

[Limited healthcare access and vaccine hesitancy in measles immunization in Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan](#)

Challenges in measles immunization include vaccine hesitancy , long distances to reach healthcare facilities and limited vaccination coverage.

Reference Guide

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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 August 8-15 in Africa.

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Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan

Limited healthcare access and vaccine hesitancy in measles immunization in Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan

South Sudan - Limited access to healthcare facilities

- A [human-interest story](#) published by Doctors Without Borders on June 5th highlighted challenges amidst the ongoing measles outbreak in South Sudan.
- In the wake of the conflict's start in Sudan four months ago, South Sudan has been addressing a [measles outbreak](#) along its border regions, where returnees and refugees have been entering the country.
- That includes **the struggle to access healthcare facilities** due to long distances to reach medical centers, **limited vaccination coverage and parents often delaying seeking healthcare until their children's illnesses have reached a critical stage.**

- In the same story, Mamman Mustapha, MSF head of mission in South Sudan said that “[...] due to **limited vaccination coverage** across the state, disruptions caused by the **COVID-19 pandemic**, and **the fact that many children over five years old have never been vaccinated before** and are therefore not targeted when vaccination campaigns do take place, we are still admitting patients for treatment more than 12 months after the first outbreak was declared.”

- According to an [article](#) published on August 2nd by Radio Tamazuj, an independent news organization and radio station established in 2011 that reports news and information related to South Sudan and Sudan, Mukair Matut Niwan, the county health director in Ayod County, Jonglei State noted that during the measles vaccination campaign, **a significant number of children in cowherd camps and fishing communities were not able to receive the vaccination.**

- The Republic of South Sudan's Weekly Situation [Weekly Situation Update](#) on the Measles Outbreak and Response revealed that a significant percentage (80%) of the reported measles cases **consisted of “children with unvaccinated or unknown vaccination status”**. The report points out gaps in immunization efforts, particularly noticeable among returnees and refugees. Since the start of

the conflict in Sudan, 4 months earlier, both [Sudanese and South Sudanese](#) have fled war-affected areas seeking safety.

Democratic Republic of Congo

- An [article](#) shared by mediacongo.net - Le Reflexe Web Congolais, a news website based in the Democratic Republic of Congo, similarly highlighted parental resistance to measles vaccination.
- In the Haut-Uele province, situated near the South Sudanese border, there are **more than 150 cases of measles** reported in the Wamba health zone.
- The health zone's chief physician, Benjamin Apokia, pointed out that **three deaths have been recorded every week** since the start of this epidemic.
- In his point of view, **parents are responsible for the increase in cases due to their delay in seeking healthcare**. In response, an awareness campaign was launched, compelling parents to promptly seek medical attention at the onset of symptoms and ensure the protection of their children's health.

Why is it concerning?

- Parents choose not to vaccinate due to misinformation or concerns about vaccine safety. The spread of misinformation about vaccines can erode public trust in field vaccinators upon their visits to hard-to-reach areas including the affected provinces. **Parents also choose to delay seeking health care until severe symptoms appear in children**. The lack of knowledge about vaccine efficacy might be one factor that can contribute to vaccine hesitancy.
- According to the Briefing Note on Displacement from Sudan to South Sudan published by [Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform](#) (SSHAP), individuals traveling into South Sudan frequently express heightened apprehension concerning their susceptibility to infectious disease outbreaks within densely populated camps. However, many of these individuals might lack an awareness of the specific risks posed by the ongoing outbreaks.

What can we do?

- According to SSHAP, access to clear and simple information about health risks, preventive measures and health services available for refugees and returnees entering into South Sudan is critical to curb the spread of diseases. Listening to people's concerns about the measles vaccine and addressing them early can improve vaccine confidence amongst parents/caregivers.

- According to the [updated version of the Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action \(CHAT\) Toolkit](#), it could be beneficial to “establish a common language among all stakeholders for defining community engagement principles, key actions, goals and benchmarks”. This might provide guidance when partnering and collaborating with communities.
- The measles social media toolkit produced by [Viral Facts Africa](#) can be a resource that covers questions and information gaps that might arise from parents. That includes questions around the measles vaccine’s efficacy and safety and more.

Persistent trend

Multi-country cholera outbreak

Mozambique

- An [article](#) published on August 8th in "O Pais," a widely read Portuguese-language newspaper in Mozambique, reports that a total of **120 cases of cholera** have been documented. Among these cases was a 15-year-old street dweller who passed away shortly after being admitted to the Cholera Treatment Center.

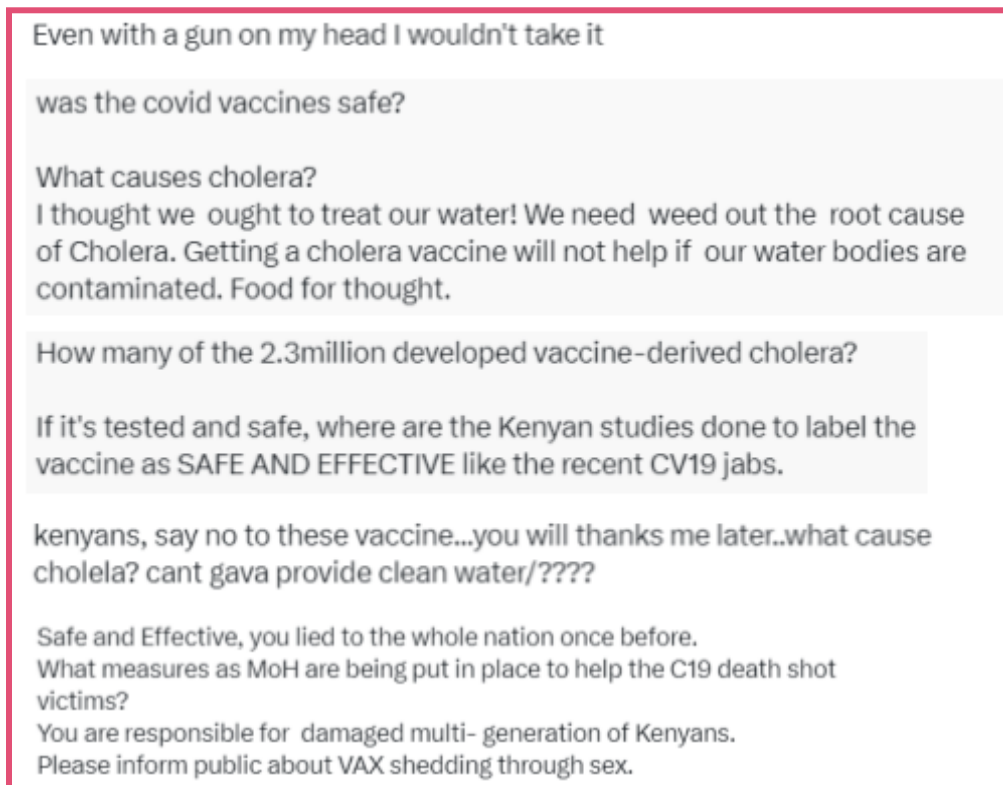
Cameroon

- In a recent Facebook [post](#) by "Le TGV de l'info," an influential online media agency based in Cameroon boasting a substantial following of 271k, the **pervasive issue of waste strewn across the streets** of Douala is underscored. The post highlighted how it poses significant health risks, including the threat of cholera outbreaks.
- Online users expressed their sentiments of dismay and disappointment, not only directed at the **local authorities but also towards citizens who contribute to the littering problem**. One user has shared a [video](#) that showcases the extent to which trash has overtaken the streets.

Kenya

- The Kenyan Ministry of Health's disseminated messages on both [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) platforms. The message affirms the safety and efficacy of the Oral Cholera Vaccine (OCV), highlighting its extensive track record spanning over a decade in effectively managing cholera outbreaks on a global scale.

- On Twitter, online users expressed sentiments of vaccine hesitancy, casting doubt on the vaccine's safety and efficacy. Alongside these sentiments were expressions of **frustration regarding access to clean water**, inquiries regarding misinformed views of **vaccine-triggered cholera**, comparisons to the **perceived ineffectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine**, and instances of misinformation concerning **vaccine shedding via sexual contact**. Below are some comments:



- On Facebook, users pointed out that the perceived efficacy of the vaccine was seen as a fabricated notion influenced by "western masters", the cholera outbreak to be another "plandemic" conspiracy theory. Additionally, one user asked about the adequate quantity of OCV doses necessary to ensure children's safety. Below are some comments:

This is another plandemic

My children have been given twice... Are they safe?

I am sure you have been given these and even without research you have pushed Kenyans.

How will I know if it is safe or western countries planting their evil seeds in kenya

The Ministry of Health how much are you paying for anyone who gets vaccinated or you give someone and you leave them like that, give something even #worldcoin were giving something after scanning.

The Ministry of Health you preached the same for the covid shots. The same lies you swallow from your western masters.

- In addition, the interest over time of cholera-related searches has been oscillating during the last monitored week leaning to a lower interest towards the 13th of August. Insights from Google Trends indicate that **"side effects of cholera vaccine" continues to be a prominent trending search compared to last week.** "Defecation" and "Food poisoning" are also breakout searches searched by online users. Since April, a series of confirmed incidents of food poisoning [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)] have affected students across various regions in the country.



- While the last [AIRA report](#) highlighted Kenya's **sustained reduction** in cholera cases, it remains interesting to note how online users are still using references to Covid19 to express distrust in the OCV.
- According to the Vaccine [Misinformation Management Field Guide](#) developed by UNICEF, false information has the potential to become ingrained in individuals' minds and maintain its impact on their thoughts, even after apparent corrections have been made.

Dengue Fever in Burkina Faso and Chad

Burkina Faso

- LeFaso.net, a prominent news platform from Burkina Faso boasting 709k Facebook followers, recently shared an [article](#) shedding light on the surge in dengue cases within Bobo-Dioulasso. The city, located in the western part of the country, is the second-largest urban center after the capital, Ouagadougou.
- In an information note dated August 11 and featured in the article, Dr. Souleymane Konaté, the Director of Medical and Technical Services at the Sourou Sanou University Hospital (CHUSS), warned of the growing number of cases of dengue fever among the population and healthcare staff.
- Dr. Konaté advocated for heightened vigilance in monitoring cases of dengue fever and other hemorrhagic illnesses, stressing the significance of early detection.
- He strongly recommended the practice of placing suspected or confirmed cases under mosquito nets while concurrently employing repellents such as insecticides to mitigate the risks posed by disease-carrying mosquitoes.

Chad

- The Ministry of Public Health and Prevention of the Republic of Chad has issued a [press release](#) on Facebook to inform the public of the outbreak of a Dengue fever epidemic in the health district of Abéché, Ouadaï Province.
- Seventeen online users commented on the post. 3 online users urged local authorities to take all necessary measures to limit the spread of this epidemic to other regions including “treating patients, providing a dengue vaccine for the general public, as well as providing rapid examinations to help patients”. Another online user asked if “patients can heal spontaneously after falling ill, and if not, what medical treatments are used, and additional examinations are requested.”
- Alwihda Info, an online news agency from Chad, alerted its 828k followers on [Facebook](#) about the outbreak. The post garnered responses from six online users. One user particularly emphasized the “urgency of fortifying the border between Abeche and the capital N'djamena”. Meanwhile, another user adopted misinformed views cautioning against the continuation of hosting French military bases in Chad leading to dire consequences in terms of epidemics.

- According to WHO's [fact sheet](#) on dengue and severe dengue fever, dengue is a viral infection caused by the dengue virus, transmitted to humans through the bite of infected mosquitoes. To prevent dengue, it is crucial to focus on prevention and control measures, such as using mosquito nets, applying repellents, and wearing protective clothing that covers the body.

Key resources

Cholera

- [WHO](#), Multi-country outbreak of cholera, External situation report #5
- [WHO](#), cholera outbreaks, W&A
- [WHO](#), Cholera fact sheet
- [VFA](#), cholera social media toolkit

Measles

- [WHO](#), Measles fact sheet
- [VFA](#), Measles social media toolkit

Dengue

- [WHO](#), Dengue fact sheet
- [WHO](#), Dengue Q&A

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 (siloe 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.