

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

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AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

22-29 August 2023

(Weekly brief #86)

Top concerns

[Information gaps and concerns rise upon confirmation of Mpox case in the Democratic Republic of Congo](#)

Online users asked questions about Mpox symptoms, its mode of transmission, and the nature of the disease following the confirmation of a case in the capital Kinshasa.

[Information gaps about frequency of polio vaccination ahead of campaign launch in Zambia](#)

Ahead of the polio vaccination campaign in Zambia, users inquired about the frequency of polio vaccination rounds and expressed skepticism about the efficacy of the vaccine.

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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 22-29 in Africa.

For more information, please contact the WHO AIRA team:

Elsa Maria Karam karam@who.int, Elodie Ho hoelodie@who.int

Information gaps and concerns rise upon confirmation of Mpox case in the Democratic Republic of Congo

- Actualite.cd, a popular news website in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) boasting 858k followers on its Facebook page, disseminated an [article](#) on August 23rd about a confirmed case of Mpox in Kinshasa, the capital of the country. More than 50 contacts of the confirmed case were identified and isolated according to the same source.
- The article highlighted that the National Institute for Biomedical Research (INRB) confirmed the case on Monday, August 21st involving a 31-year-old male who came to the capital from Inongo, in the province of Mai-Ndombe.
- Two days prior to the confirmation, news.cd, an online media agency with 292k followers, shared an [article](#) on August 21st about a suspected case of Mpox recorded in Kwango province in the southwestern part of the country. The suspected case is pending lab results.
- We tracked a total of five social media posts across platforms like Facebook and X commenting about both updates. These posts encompassed updates from prominent online news agencies in the country such as News.cd [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)], [actualite.cd](#), and [politico.cd](#), additionally, a [post](#) from Kinshasa-based journalist Pitchou Mangaya.
- In response to the journalist's [post](#) regarding the suspected case of Mpox, five online users voiced their opinions, drawing a comparison between Mpox and COVID-19 pandemic including the exploitation of diseases for financial gain and **the concern over potential virus mutations akin to the variations observed with COVID-19**. Below are some comments translated from French:

After their failure with the COVID-19 they create others.
The Corona virus has taught us everything. We heard it all.
What is to be feared is the mutation of the virus.

This time, we will no longer be under tension! Like
Covid 19, it will certainly pass

Covid 19 made them rich and monkeypox will multiply their fortunes.
Congratulations, it's medicine that wins and the hatched doctors will
come out of there better winners!

- Online users also showed curiosity regarding Mpox **symptoms, and its mode of transmission, and asked questions about the nature of the disease across the rest of the monitored social media posts.** Below are some comments translated from french:

We need more details on the disease please!

WHAT DISEASE IS IT PLEASE

infertility disease

It's a disease that can be transmitted by hanging or bringing the body
closer to ndenge nini really ? you had to give us more details anyway

A new epidemic? And virus... 😞😞😞

Would it be better for you to provide more details about Monkeypox?

- The WHO Director-General [declared](#) in May 2023 the end of the Public Health Emergency of International Concern for Mpox.
- In a previous [AIRA report](#), we reported the low level of engagement on mpox and on all social media posts compared to other outbreaks in Africa. We also noted that 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.”**

Why is it concerning?

- Mpox is endemic in the DRC, but the fact that a case was confirmed in Kinshasa, a city of 16 million people, raises concerns about the potential of a larger outbreak.
- The persistent information gaps about Mpox **symptoms, and its mode of transmission**, could lead to the spread of misinformation or misconceptions about the disease, potentially hindering appropriate preventative measures and treatment.
- The emergence of concerns about virus mutations in diseases beyond COVID-19 can be concerning as some individuals might extrapolate the experiences derived from the pandemic to other disease outbreaks. This can lead to the creation of misconceptions about the potential impact of mutations and the effectiveness of interventions from public health sources working on mitigating the impact of the disease.

What can we do?

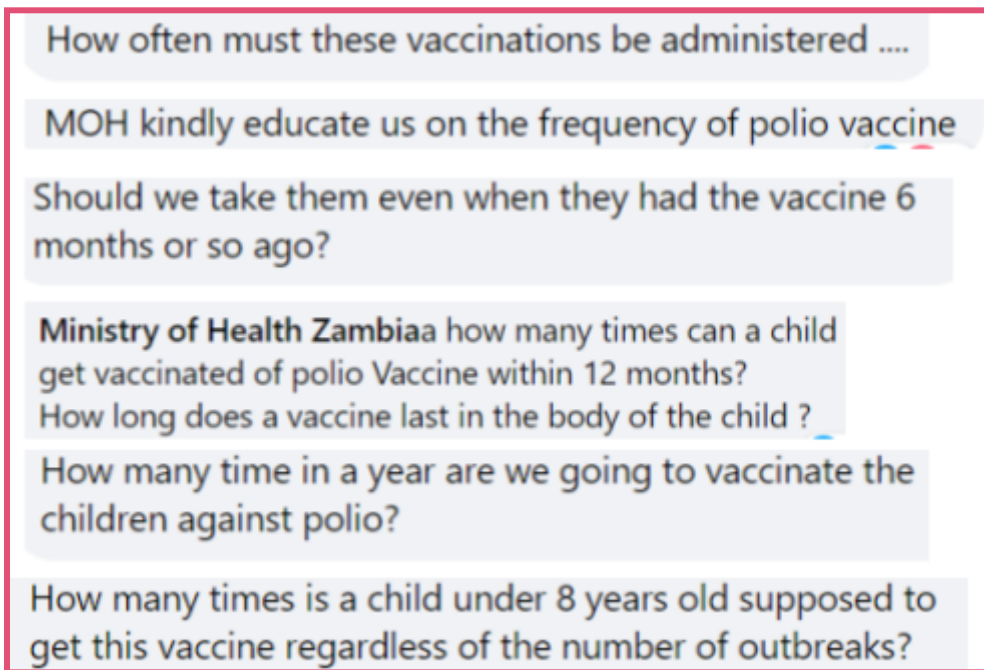
- [Standing recommendations](#) for Mpox have been issued by the WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on August 22nd, 2023, to address the long-term management of the disease. According to a post by the WHO on [X](#), these recommendations “should be followed by newly affected countries during the outbreak as well as previously affected ones, especially in the African region, where **mpox regularly occurs, transmission less well understood, and origins of outbreaks largely unknown mpox regularly occurs, transmission less well understood, and origins of outbreaks largely unknown.**”
- WHO issued temporary recommendations in the 2022-2023 mpox Strategic Preparedness and Response [2022-2023 mpox Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan](#) that are also relevant:
 - 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.
- Within the context of the DRC, efforts could be geared towards enhancing the **comprehension regarding transmission methods, symptoms, and overall nature** of the disease to community members in order to respond to outbreaks and community transmission. Sustained efforts contribute in combating the disease and preventing further spread.

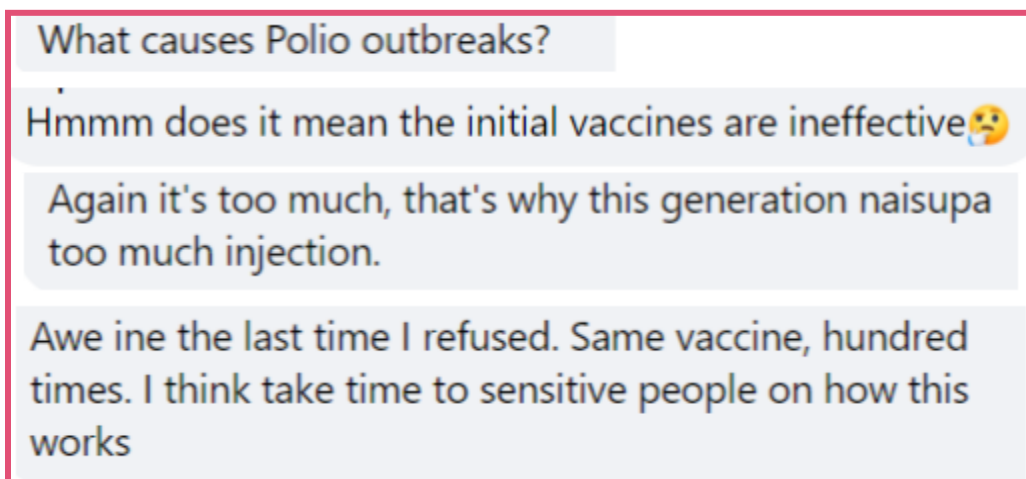
Zambia

Information gaps about frequency of polio vaccination ahead of campaign launch in Zambia

- The Ministry of Health in Zambia has officially declared on its Facebook page the commencement of a [polio vaccination campaign](#), set to kick off on August 31st.
- According to the [Global Polio Eradication Initiative](#), Zambia verified a case of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) in June 2023. This case was identified in Lusaka province, the nation's capital.
- Among the 584 comments tracked during the report's monitoring period, approximately 80 online users shared comments asking about the frequency of polio vaccination doses within the country. Below are some questions:



- ❑ Other online users raised inquiries regarding the causes of a polio outbreak, seeking clarification on whether the vaccination campaign implied inefficacy of the previous vaccine doses. In addition, a user expressed discontent with what they perceived as excessive vaccinations, while another individual declined the vaccine, citing confusion about its mechanism after multiple administrations. Below are some comments:



- ❑ Kalembe, an online media agency defining itself as "Zambia's most trusted, credible and authentic source of online news" garnered the attention of 100 users who engaged with a recent Facebook [post](#).
- ❑ Among them, 6 online users expressed their concerns including an online user inquiring about the frequency of polio vaccinations.

- One user voiced skepticism, questioning whether the new vaccination campaign implied the ineffectiveness of previous vaccine administrations.
- One user's comment inquired about the reason why children fall ill after vaccination. The user expressed concern about the upcoming school reopening, predicting potential disruptions to attendance due to vaccine-related illnesses delaying their return until October. Below are some comments:

Why is it that when kids are vaccinated, they become sick...now that schools are opening children will report in October because of this

How many of these polio vaccines should our bundulos be subjected to kansi? Awe vacilamo manje. Are they telling us that the same vaccines previously administered are ineffective? How then should we trust the forthcoming ones if that be the case?

What happened to the once off polio vaccine? Is this a booster?

Why is it concerning?

- Unanswered concerns, especially from parents/caregivers, about the number of doses required against polio are leading to questions about **the necessity of vaccinating children and to misinformation about vaccine effectiveness.**
- Online users expressing hesitancy regarding the frequency of vaccine rounds may also be uncertain about the necessity of follow-up vaccinations for their children, if already administered.

What can we do?

- Communicate that Polio is a highly infectious viral disease that can lead to severe paralysis or even death and the recommended **frequency of vaccines is determined by public health experts** “depending on local epidemiological and programmatic circumstances, to ensure the best possible protection to populations can be provided.” **according to the [symptoms and risks section](#) of the polio fact sheet.**
- Sharing vaccine schedules on social media platforms managed by the Ministry of Health and credible sources such as WHO Zambia can effectively address user inquiries and close the information gap on the frequency of polio rounds.

Upcoming HPV vaccination rollout in Nigeria

- Nigeria is set to incorporate the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine into its standard immunization schedule according to a Facebook [post](#) by the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA).
- The news garnered the attention of nine online news agencies during the monitoring period, among them prominent publications such as Punch newspaper [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] and [Premium Times](#).
- A [commenter](#) on Punch newspaper inquired whether the HPV vaccine is applicable to men, or if it is exclusively intended for women. Two additional users [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] expressed a preference for natural remedies over immunization, citing accessibility and benefits as key factors in their viewpoint.
- A [commenter](#) on Premium Times mentioned that some individuals might be influenced by their pastors to avoid taking the HPV vaccine, leading them to abstain from it. It's important to note that during the bi-annual review meeting with religious leaders on Primary Health Care, [Dr. Faisal Shuaib](#), the CEO of NPHCDA, appealed for the cooperation of religious leaders to ensure **“seamless rollout and uptake of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine across the nation”**.
- Lastly, a [user](#) raised doubts about the vaccine's composition, expressing concern that it might be like the COVID vaccine perceived as “poisonous”.
- The NPHCDA has [dispelled](#) myths and shared factual information about the HPV vaccine. Continuous monitoring of online and offline conversations about the HPV vaccine is crucial ahead of the vaccine roll-out in September to slowly feed accurate information into the media ecosystem.
- In a [news release](#) in January 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that **“cervical cancer ranks as the 2nd most frequent cancer among women in Nigeria and the 2nd most frequent cancer death among women between 15 and 44 years of age.”**

Key resources

Polio

- [WHO](#), Polio fact sheet
- [WHO](#), Polio Q&A
- [VFA](#), Polio social media toolkit
- [WHO](#), Statement of the Thirty-sixth Meeting of the Polio IHR Emergency Committee

Mpox

- [WHO](#), Standing recommendations for mpox issued by the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) in accordance with the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR)
- [VFA](#), Mpox social media toolkit
- [WHO](#), Mpox fact sheet
- [WHO](#), Mpox Q&A

HPV

- [VFA](#), HPV social media toolkit
- [WHO](#), Cervical cancer fact sheet
- [PAHO](#), HPV Explainer

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.