

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



**AIRA Infodemic Trends Report**

**30 August - 5 September 2023**

**(Weekly brief #87)**

# Top concerns

## [Measles epidemic severely impacts North and South Kivu in the DRC](#)

The measles outbreak in the DRC is exacerbated by various factors including the limited awareness of the disease in communities and the use of traditional home-based remedies for managing measles cases.

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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 30 - September 5 in Africa.

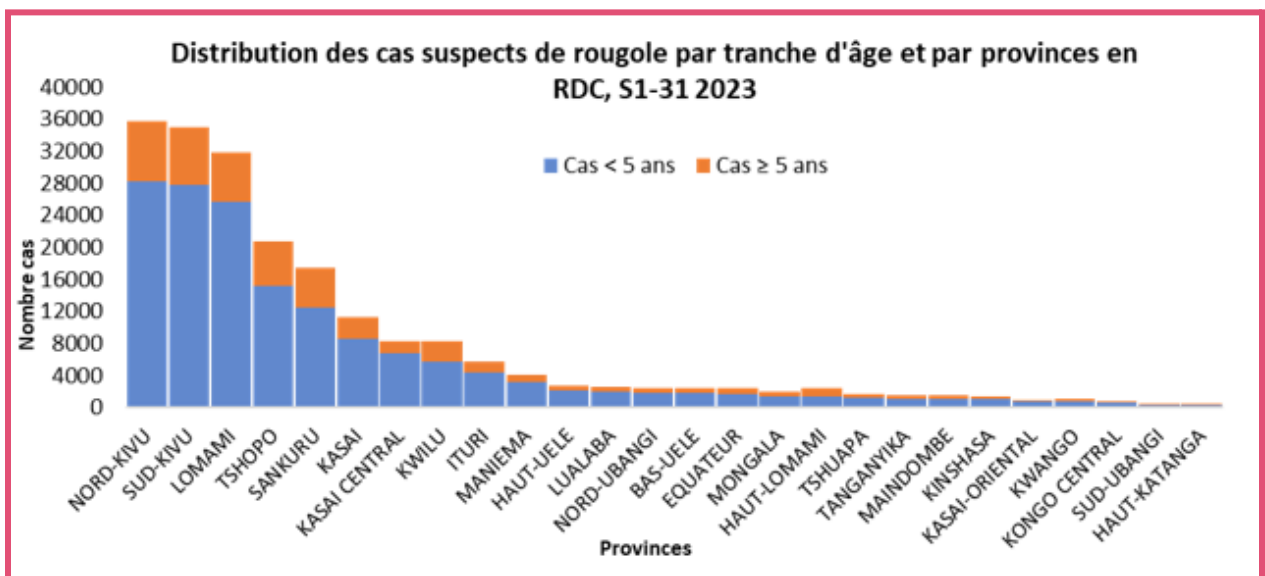
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## Democratic Republic of Congo

### Measles epidemic severely impacts North and South Kivu in the DRC

- According to the [analysis of the measles situation in the DRC](#) shared on 19 August, the measles epidemic from the start of 2023 to August, has affected all of “the country’s 26 provinces with at least one health zone.”
- According to the same report, the Ministry of Public Health, Hygiene and Prevention and its partners, including MSF and WHO, reported as of 19 August that “North Kivu province is in the lead, with 34,565 cases and 154 deaths, followed by South Kivu, with 33,194 cases and 212 deaths.” Below is a map showing the distribution of suspected measles cases by age group and provinces in the DRC.



- It’s important to note that **77%** of affected children are under 5 years of age, and **23%** are 5 years or older.
- According to the DRC-based infodemic management team, some of the factors contributing to measles-related fatalities include:
  - **Limited awareness of the disease in communities.**
  - **Traditional home-based remedies used for managing measles cases.**

- Prominent online media agencies including Politico.cd [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] and [7sur7.cd](#) amplified the news with a focus on the Kasai region. Among the reactions, **there was a sense of anxiety and concern regarding the topic** with one [user](#) sharing a personal experience of their child's past battle with the illness.
- [Radio Okapi](#), [Media Congo.net](#), and [Actualite.cd](#) have collectively issued warnings to their audiences regarding the resurgence of measles among children under the age of 5 in Kindu, Maniema, located in the eastern region of the country. According to the articles, the outbreak is coinciding with a healthcare worker strike. Consequently, **parents are grappling with the challenge of providing care for their children, with some resorting to traditional treatments, which is further exacerbating the crisis.**
- In the AIRA report [#84](#), we have highlighted that a measles awareness campaign has been initiated, urging parents to seek medical care upon recognizing symptoms of measles among their children, thus safeguarding their well-being.
- In the AIRA report [#83](#), we've noted comments from online users during the polio campaign in the DRC, emphasizing the need to prioritize measles vaccination. One comment specifically highlighted the Kasai area as a matter of particular concern.

### Why is it concerning?

- Parents and caregivers in the DRC are anxious and concerned about the disease's impact on their children but are hesitant to vaccinate them or unable to get access to health services and vaccination.

### What can we do?

- According to a publication by Fondation Hirondelle, Demos, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Icredes titled "[Influencers and Influencing for better accountability in the DRC](#)" radio is the primary source of information for the population in Eastern DRC including (Nord, Sud Kivu). Therefore regular dissemination of measles campaigns through news bulletins and entertainment sections can help amplify news about the importance of vaccinating children against measles, and also address people's concerns about the vaccine and inform where they can access health services.
- Establishing trust with parents and caregivers is paramount in facilitating the vaccination of children against measles and other preventable diseases.

- Hearing parent's preoccupations and concerns first and addressing them ahead of immediate inoculation of children could be one way to improve vaccine confidence and uptake.

## Multi-country cholera outbreak

### Cameroon

- Équinoxe TV, a prominent private television station in Cameroon boasting a substantial Facebook following of 1.2 million, recently [covered](#) a cholera case in a Douala neighborhood.
- The report revolved around the demise of a patient within the community, an event that triggered concern among the residents. **The neighbors urged the wife to consider relocating, fearing that her presence might pose a risk of contagion to the entire locality, which raises concerns of stigmatization and show information gaps about how cholera spreads.**
- The report shed light on a prevailing anxiety and growing concerns among the population about cholera.

### Ethiopia

- The [situation update #26, regarding the impact of the situation in Sudan on Ethiopia](#) as of September 1, 2023 puts forward that as of August 28, 2023, **“at least 2,500 cases of cholera have emerged across 25 woredas (an administrative division in Ethiopia) in the Amhara region”** since the initial outbreak in July 2023. Additionally, within the woreda of Metema, a total of sixteen cholera cases have been officially confirmed.
- It's noteworthy that Metema stands as a pivotal destination for refugees and asylum seekers who are fleeing from Sudan. Among 78,589 individuals have crossed the border into Ethiopia, “18,558 crossed via Metema, 15,960 via Kurmuk, and 700 via Pagak and Burbiey entry points in the Gambela Region” according to the situation report.

## Diphtheria in Guinea

- The [World Health Organization in Guinea](#) has recently reported an outbreak of diphtheria, with a case fatality rate of 30% as of the 29th of August.

- In the eastern region of Kankan, the severity of the disease is further underscored, where 87.5% of the confirmed cases, representing 14 out of 16 individuals, have succumbed to the disease.
- In the same video disseminated by WHO Guinea on their official Facebook page, Dr. Seydou Dia, World Health Emergencies Programme team lead mentioned that many healthcare workers in Guinea only have a theoretical knowledge of the disease and have not managed cases before, which may have contributed to the spread of the disease
- In fact, the last recorded cases of diphtheria in Guinea date back to 2005, as per the [data recorded](#) in the Reported cases and incidence of Diphtheria, collected annually through the WHO/UNICEF Joint Reporting Form on Immunization.
- Online news agencies have shown limited coverage of the topic so far. Nevertheless, on September 2nd, the Facebook page of the [Consumers' Union of Guinea](#) shared a post, reaching an audience of 31,000 followers, to raise awareness about the growing spread of the disease. Notably, two online users inquired for more information regarding the nature of the disease.

## Key resources

### Measles

- [WHO](#), Measles fact sheet
- [VFA](#), Measles social media toolkit
- [WHO](#) literature on the risk of measles for children
- [UNICEF](#) immunization roadmap

### 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
- Social Science in Epidemics: [cholera lessons learned](#)
- [Global Task Force on Cholera Control](#), clarifying rumors and community concerns

### Diphtheria

- [WHO](#) Fact sheet

## 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.