

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



**AIRA Infodemic Trends Report**

**17-24 October 2023**

**(Weekly brief #94)**

# Top concerns

## [Sentiments of weariness from online users amidst diphtheria outbreak in Guinea](#)

Children, specifically girls aged 1-4 years old, are the most affected by the diphtheria outbreak in Guinea.

## [Shifting online sentiment: from distrust to gratitude in dengue discussions in Burkina Faso](#)

The perception of how dengue is being managed in Burkina Faso has changed and shows a greater sense of trust in the actions taken by local authorities..

## [Conversations around measles and cholera in Sudan's neighbouring countries six months into the war](#)

Reports about aid shortages, national interventions and health challenges faced by displaced communities remain constant six months into the conflict.

# 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 October 17-24 in Africa.

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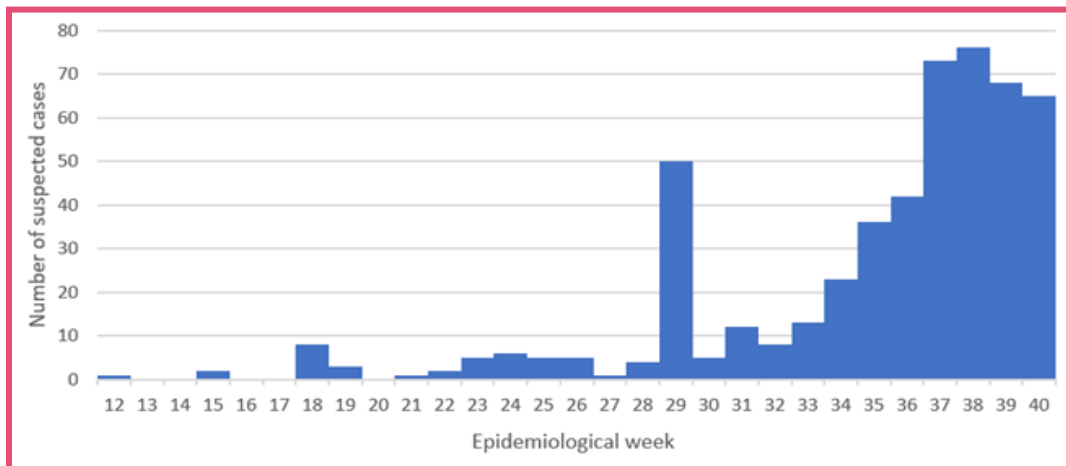
## Guinea

# Sentiments of weariness from online users amidst diphtheria outbreak in Guinea

Engagement: **18 posts, 774 likes, 50 comments**

## Social media commentary and situation at a glance

- [Guineematin.com](#), a Guinean online news agency [[119.4k followers](#)] reported a diphtheria outbreak on 19th of October. At the time of monitoring, 19 online users shared a general sentiment of [weariness](#) and [skepticism](#) about the outbreak. They also said local authorities may have allegedly [created epidemics](#) including Ebola and [COVID-19](#).
- According to [WHO](#), “538 cases have been reported, including 18 confirmed cases (including 13 deaths). Of the cases reported, 62% are female. The 1-4 years age group, with 445 cases, accounted for the largest proportion of reported cases.”



WHO: Suspected diphtheria cases by epidemiological week in Guinea, as of 13 October 2023

## Why is it concerning?

- The WHO risk assessment of diphtheria in Guinea is considered high due to the low vaccination coverage: “[low DTP3 vaccination coverage in the affected region \(36% according to the survey coverage in households, 2023\)](#) and [47% national DTP3 vaccination coverage between 2014-2022 \(per WHO/UNICEF estimates\)](#)”<sup>1</sup>. The percentages are insufficient for achieving the coverage of 80–85% required to maintain community protection.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization (18 October 2023). Disease Outbreak News; Diphtheria in Guinea. Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2023-DON492>

- [Diphtheria is a highly contagious disease](#), and if not addressed promptly, it can spread rapidly within communities. The outbreak is characterised by high case fatality among confirmed cases, specifically young children from 1-4 years old making them more vulnerable to the spread of diphtheria.
- Sentiments of weariness can be connected to a broader sentiment of pandemic fatigue, which could lead to reduced receptiveness to further updates or information regarding the outbreak.
- 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. A resurgence of diphtheria in 2023 may be linked to vaccine hesitancy following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- There's an outbreak in Guinea's neighbouring countries including Nigeria and Niger. According to [Africa CDC](#), "the Federal Republic of Nigeria has seen a significant surge in diphtheria cases, reporting 13,145 cases and 493 deaths by October 5, 2023. The Republic of Niger declared the outbreak on August 17, 2023, with 865 cases and 37 deaths reported across nine regions, primarily in the Matameye district bordering Nigeria". Cross border transmission might facilitate the spread of the disease.

### What can we do?

- Continuous monitoring of online and offline community feedback about conversations around diphtheria to capture information gaps or rumours that might prevent parents from immunising their children against diphtheria. Vaccination remains the only way to prevent the disease.
- Share further communication resources such as the Viral Facts Africa social media video on [diphtheria](#) to highlight the severity of the disease. The video can be shared on WhatsApp chats to feed accurate information into the information ecosystem.
- Advocate for risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) efforts, such as raising awareness about the symptoms, transmission methods that affect children among parents of patients about the disease.

## Burkina Faso

### Shifting online sentiment: from distrust to gratitude in dengue discussions in Burkina Faso

**Engagement: 40 posts, 18K likes, 1.5K comments**

### **Social media commentary and situation at a glance**

- On October 17th, the Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene announced [efforts to provide free rapid diagnostic tests \(RDT\)](#) kits to public health facilities, until the end of the dengue epidemic.
- This initiative received widespread coverage from numerous [online news agencies](#) and private users including [health influencers](#) and [journalists](#). A large portion of online users expressed gratitude towards local authorities for taking this step.
- There were some users who expressed concerns about the kit's [accessibility](#), sought [clarification](#) about the origin of the epidemic, expressed worries about the severity of the disease (comparing it to being more dangerous than [COVID-19](#)), and mentioned a recurring narrative that the increase of dengue cases is the result of the release of [GM mosquitoes](#) in 2019.

### **Why is it concerning?**

- In a previous [AIRA report](#), we have communicated a displayed lack of trust from online users towards local health authorities. This was primarily due to concerns about the release of genetically modified (GM) mosquitoes in 2019 amidst the increase of dengue cases in the country. Following this initiative, the narrative has shifted with a display of trust in local authorities' handling of the outbreak.
- Access to free tests can raise public awareness about dengue, potentially leading to improved disease prevention practices and early detection, and better data for future intervention from local authorities.
- The mortality rates for dengue outbreaks in Burkina Faso have notably increased in 2023 compared to outbreaks [2016 and 2017](#) (33 deaths combined). According to [recent data by the Ministry of Health](#): From January 1 to October 15, 2023, the country reported 50,478 suspected cases, which included 25,502 probable cases and 214 deaths. For the week of October 09 to 15, 2023, there was a surge with 10,117 suspected cases, comprising 4,377 probable cases and 48 recorded deaths.
- There are still concerns about the origins of the epidemic and its spread within the country. These might still resurge in future conversations about the disease if not addressed.

## What can we do?

- Advocate for RCCE material in hotspot areas including Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso about the importance of early reporting and case management of suspected cases. This can initiate a timely treatment of suspected cases.
- Advocate for an explainer about the release of GM mosquitoes through a two-way communication between the scientific community and the general public. This might foster an understanding of scientific findings and prevent further speculations about the topic.

## Ethiopia, Chad, South Sudan, Central African Republic

### Conversations around measles and cholera in Sudan's neighbouring countries six months into the war

- Six months since the war erupted, the number of people that have fled to Sudan's neighbouring countries has surpassed [one million](#). Chad, Egypt, and South Sudan are hosting the largest portion of people displaced.
- At the beginning of the conflict, key themes included [routine immunisation campaigns](#) and reports about Sudan's affected [health system](#). The number of Facebook posts doubled within 4 months including posts about the [operational steps](#) to support the humanitarian crisis in Eastern Chad, [increasing measles cases](#), [aid shortages](#) in South Sudan and increasing [cholera cases](#) in Ethiopia. Facebook posts by the Chadian Ministry of Health about the ongoing [interventions](#) in Eastern Chad remained high throughout the crisis.

## Why is it concerning?

- Over the past two months, regional media outlets have exhibited fluctuating levels of interest in the consequences of the Sudan crisis, resulting in declining coverage of health issues. In the context of conflict and instability, the frequency of reports about contagious diseases among vulnerable communities may require constant attention.
- Online public engagement remained low in the context of the Sudan war. The contrast between social media commentary and media coverage highlights the need to gain a deeper understanding about the challenges faced by refugees, returnees and host communities.
- In the monitored period, key themes still highlight aid shortages and response strategies to support access to basic necessities among displaced people. The prolonged focus suggests that the humanitarian crisis resulting from the Sudan

war remains severe and enduring, requiring sustained international attention and support.

### What can we do?

- The influx into Sudan's neighbouring countries has long-term implications for public health and healthcare infrastructure. This underscores the need to monitor and communicate the evolving health challenges particularly around measles and cholera.
- Gathering community feedback through agencies working in the conflict-affected areas might produce a wider scope of knowledge about the ongoing challenges.

## Persistent trend

### Cholera in Zambia

- The Minister of Health in Zambia, Sylvia Masebo, reminded online users to adhere to cholera preventive measures in a [video](#) shared following the confirmation of a new cholera case in Lusaka, the capital. The case was a 21-year-old female from Kanyama compound.
- 10 online news agencies reported the death of the 21-year-old female garnering 2K comments. Commentators expressed their concerns about the [lack of access to safe water](#) in Lusaka, their [sadness](#) about the news and their [surprise](#) at a cholera case occurring before the start of the rainy season. "With the current erratic water supply across the province, expect a rise in [cholera] case numbers" [a user commented](#).
- In [2017](#), a cholera outbreak in Zambia hit densely populated sub-districts of Lusaka including Chipata and Kanyama, where inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure contributed to the rapid spread of cholera.

## Trend to watch

### Anthrax in Zambia

- Four online news outlets have covered an anthrax outbreak in Sinazongwe district, situated in the Southern Province of Zambia. Commentators have expressed apprehension about their [safety](#) in at least 28 comments, raised doubts about the accuracy of the [information](#), voiced concerns regarding the implementation of [public health guidelines](#), and inquired about the [nature of the disease](#). Below are some examples:

Problems of not following public health guidelines, why not have it butchered and inspected by professionals?

The consequences of eating meat that has not been Inspected and Certified safe for human consumption by the meat inspector!!

And how do they know it is not a bio-weapon? when there are no security measures in place to detect such.

## Key resources

### Diphtheria

- [WHO](#), diphtheria fact sheet
- [WHO](#), manual for quality control of diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and combined vaccines
- [WHO](#), diphtheria: vaccine preventable diseases surveillance standards
- [WHO](#), transmission-based precautions for the prevention and control of infections
- [WHO](#), diphtheria: clinical management of respiratory diphtheria
- [VFA](#), social media toolkit on diphtheria

### Dengue

- [WHO](#), dengue fact sheet
- [WHO](#), dengue Q&A
- [VFA](#), social media toolkit on dengue fever

### Cholera

- [WHO](#), multi-country outbreak of cholera, external situation report #5
- [WHO](#), cholera outbreaks, Q&A
- [UNICEF Zimbabwe](#), cholera awareness mini-series
- [VFA](#), cholera social media toolkit
- Social Science in epidemics: [cholera lessons learned](#)
- [Global Task Force on Cholera Control](#), clarifying rumours and community concerns.

## 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.