

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

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AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

4-11 December 2023

(Weekly brief #100)

Top concerns

[High concern about the rise of malaria and cholera cases amid el niño flooding in the Horn of Africa](#)

The Horn of Africa is grappling with floods and landslides due to el nino. Limited sanitation and natural disasters impede efforts to curb the spread of malaria and cholera.

[Cameroonian blogger claims child suffered burns following polio vaccination at school](#)

The level of engagement on vaccine-related news is still high on social media. Polio vaccine disinformation in Cameroon might have a potential spillover effect on the current malaria vaccination.

[The risk of anthrax outbreak at regional level considered high](#)

The ban on livestock movement continues to affect business owners and beef dealers and generate the highest share of conversations about anthrax.

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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 December 4-11 in Africa.

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Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Africa, Zimbabwe

High concern about malaria and cholera cases amid el niño flooding and current outbreaks

Engagement: 28 posts, 1449 likes, 198 comments, 12K views

Social media commentary and situation at a glance

- Countries across Eastern and Southern Africa are grappling with the impacts of floods and cholera outbreaks, particularly during the rainy season.
- Lamu, Kenya** faced severe flood damage, resulting in infrastructure destruction and a cholera surge, prompting government emergency response according to [Citizen TV](#). [The Star, Kenya](#), reported that Machakos county has been put on high alert for a possible cholera outbreak. In **Zambia**, inadequate toilet facilities at Nega Nega government complex raised cholera concerns as per [Sun fm Zambia](#). According to [Channel Ten Tz](#), residents from **Dar es Salaam, Tanzania**, received warnings from district authorities about the risks of crossing flooded roads during rains to prevent disease outbreaks. The [South African Broadcasting Corporation](#) (SABC) highlighted that, a patient in **Gqeberha, South Africa** with cholera symptoms is isolated, awaiting toxigenicity results while online users voice [infrastructure concerns](#). [Addis Standard](#) drew attention to widespread flooding effects, impacting health centres and schools in **Ethiopia's Somali region**, hindering access to those affected. In flood-hit **Samburu, Kenya**, red cross warns of possible malaria and waterborne disease outbreaks on [K24 TV](#), citing stagnant water and overgrown vegetation, with increased risks for expectant and lactating mothers, and children. In **Zimbabwe**, [Zimpapers TV Network](#) zeroed in on suspected cholera cases amidst the current outbreak. Cases have been attributed to poor sanitation with the contamination of most boreholes in Harare.

Why is it concerning?

- Flooding can place considerable strain on health services, primarily through the damage of infrastructure and restricted access to essential medications. This circumstance may result in delays in providing necessary care or treatment, particularly critical support for conditions such as malaria and cholera.

- Floods can contribute to the spread of malaria. Floods can create a conducive environment (such as stagnant water, the contamination of water and warm temperatures) to the breeding of mosquitoes, including malaria parasites.
- Limited access to basic water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) remains a significant challenge amidst the ongoing increase in cholera cases across the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR).
- The 2023 national report from South Africa's Department of Water and Sanitation highlights in the executive summary that “[the most vulnerable and concerning area is the overall sub-standard quality of drinking water to the receiving population](#)”.

What can we do?

- Collaborating with local health authorities to promote awareness and facilitate the distribution of mosquito nets to reduce severe health outcomes and lower chances of being infected with malaria.
- Identifying appropriate channels of communication to share messages about the health and safety risks during natural disasters could prevent risky behaviours (driving during floods etc.). A free toll number or contact for the affected population can be one way to answer questions and raise awareness about health and safety measures people can put in place.
- The [cholera outbreak response manual by the global task force on cholera control](#) can serve as a resource for managing cholera outbreaks during floods and other expected weather patterns.

Cameroon

Cameroonian blogger claims child suffered severe burns following polio vaccination at school in Cameroon

Engagement: **2 posts, 3340 likes, 781 comments**

Social media commentary and situation at a glance

- N'zui Manto Yi Sep Sep, a Cameroonian blogger, has been observed advocating for anti-western views, anti-government stances but no clear anti-vacc agenda on both his Facebook and X accounts.
- On his [Telegram](#) and [Facebook](#) channels, there have been instances of disinformation wherein he has claimed that a child suffered severe burns after receiving a polio vaccine at school.

- He has strongly discouraged parents from accepting any vaccines, including the malaria vaccine currently administered by the Ministry of Health. Additionally, he has asserted that those responsible for organising the vaccination campaign are unaccounted for the child's burns.
- He shared an uncensored video of the child on his Telegram channel, although the content of the video does not explicitly reference the polio vaccination.
- The predominant inclination among the 781 commentators was to engage with information that resonated with their pre-existing beliefs regarding vaccination. In addition, some mirrored sentiments echoed by other pan-Africanist accounts, expressing a collective stance favouring the rejection of vaccination. Below are some comments translated from French:

They came to my house, I told them that my child is up to date with his vaccinations, they wrote on my portal "refusal", I deleted

I have already told my son's teacher, zero vaccines for him, the day he tells me that she is being vaccinated at school, it's 1 week of general fighting throughout the establishment

Once we vaccinated my 4 year old daughter against measles at school 🤔 I swear I was one step away from losing this child...I said never again vaccines ndjoh

Why is it concerning?

- An observable surge in the dissemination of vaccine-related disinformation by African and Cameroonian social media influencers, including bloggers and activists, has been noted.
[AIRA report 98](#) brought attention to specific accounts such as Nathalie Yamb (374K followers) and Egountchi Behanzin (17.1K followers) for their promotion of vaccine disinformation, particularly in response to the dispatch of the RTS,S malaria vaccine to Cameroon.
- Online communities can form echo chambers, creating environments where false information is shared and reinforced without critical examination.
- The deliberate spread of disinformation about polio heightens concerns about the potential spillover effect on the current malaria vaccination efforts in Cameroon.

What can we do?

- Advocate for a training of social media influencers on the prevention and fight against false rumours and disinformation relating to vaccination against childhood diseases preventable by vaccination and malaria.
- Amplify success stories on influencers' social media accounts that promote the progress in polio eradication in Africa. Social media influencers can also share content from Viral Facts Africa on malaria and polio to provide fact-based information.
- Debunk disinformation regarding the alleged connection between children experiencing burns and polio vaccination by presenting verified and substantiated facts.
- Work with fact-checkers to inoculate people against disinformation, by exposing for example the tactics used to manipulate opinion to serve an agenda.
- Continue to promote the [benefits of the current RTS,S malaria vaccine](#) including a substantial 30% reduction in severe malaria cases, even in regions with widespread use of insecticide-treated nets and accessible diagnostic and treatment facilities.

Zambia, Uganda, South Sudan

The risk of anthrax outbreak at regional level considered high

Engagement: **9 posts, 310 likes, 57 comments**

Social media commentary and situation at a glance

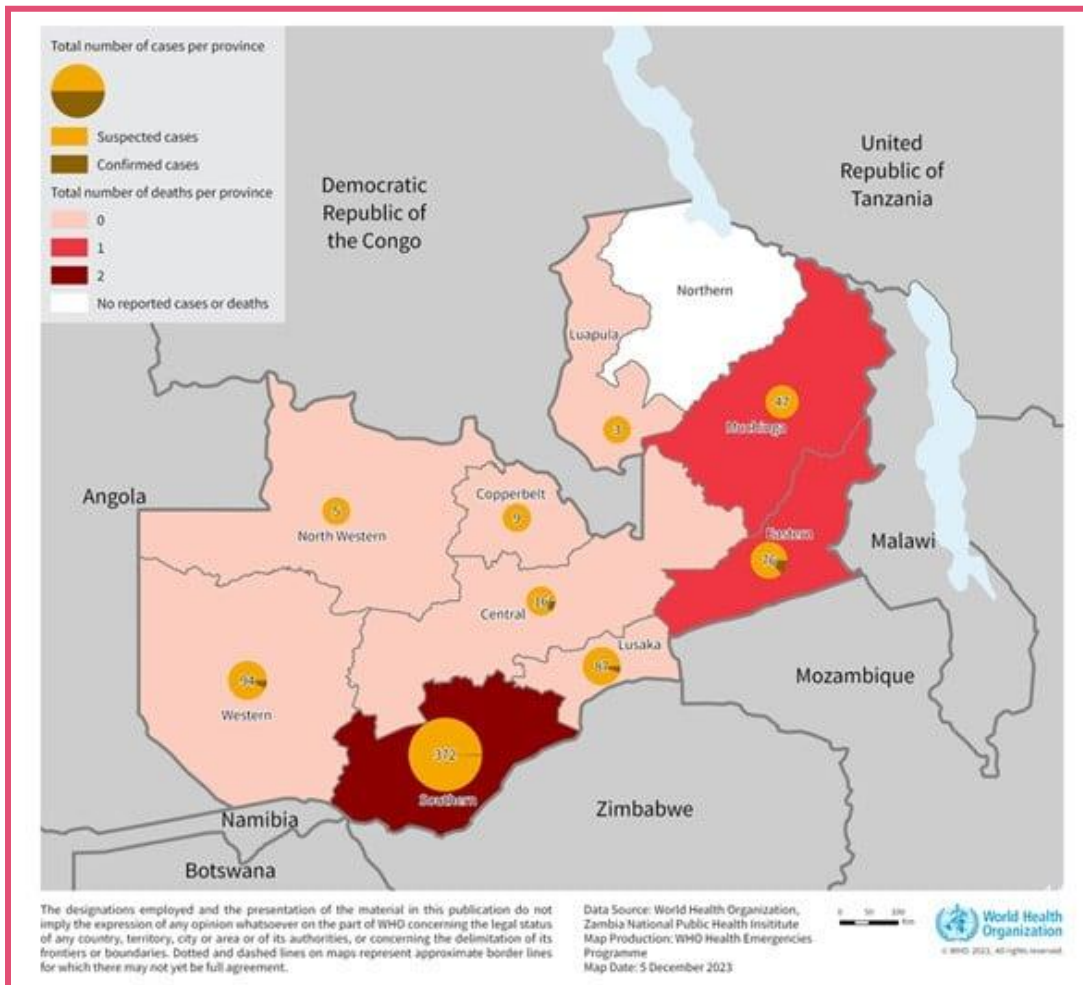
- In East Africa, varied concerns arise regarding the outbreak of Anthrax in different regions.
- In **Uganda's Kyotera district**, according to [91.2 CROOZE FM](#), local authorities declared a two-week quarantine as the anthrax outbreak claimed 17 lives, with locals turning to traditional herbalists. Beef product dealers voice [discontent](#) with the local authorities' declaration. As per [Byta FM Zambia](#), **In Choma district, Zambian** residents are expressing concerns about the effectiveness of milk kiosk operators in regulating milk due to fears of Anthrax transmission. As per [Byta FM Zambia](#), **in Kalomo, Zambia**, the district administration opposed calls to lift the livestock movement ban before the veterinary department completes vaccinations. The push for lifting the ban stems from the economic challenges faced by the business community due to the restrictions on livestock

movement and the closure of local abattoirs and butcheries. In the meantime, Kalomo farmers and slaughterers protest the unavailability of Anthrax vaccines according to [Voice Of Kalomo Community Radio Station 89.9fm](#).

According to [Eye Radio](#), **South Sudan** online users reported concerns about the influx of sick cattle and beef from neighbouring regions.

Why is it concerning?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) has assessed the [risk of Anthrax outbreak as high](#) on 8 December 2023, primarily attributed to the frequent movement of both animals and people between Zambia and its neighbouring countries. The declaration of a high-risk status plays a crucial role in guiding national and international responses to health emergencies.
- As per the World Health Organization (WHO), the current Anthrax outbreak in Zambia is affecting [nine out of the ten country provinces](#). In contrast, prior outbreaks were limited to the Northwest and Western provinces, with sporadic cases over the years.



Source: [WHO](#), Distribution of anthrax cases by province, Zambia, as of 20 November 2023

What can we do?

- Economic support (cash transfers or alternative livelihood options) was documented as an effective option to mitigate the livelihood loss for cattle owners and beef sellers. This can help mitigate the economic impact of anthrax and make individuals less resistant to regulatory measures imposed by authorities.
- Collaborate with neighbouring countries to share information, resources, and best practices in managing Anthrax outbreaks, considering the cross-border nature of the issue.
- [Anthrax](#) is not typically transmitted through milk, whether from cows or humans. However, it's essential to note that milk or other food products can potentially become contaminated if animals graze in areas where anthrax spores are present in the soil. Therefore, proper food safety measures and monitoring of livestock are crucial to prevent the spread of the disease. Pasteurisation of milk can also help eliminate bacteria, including *Bacillus anthracis*, further reducing the risk of transmission through milk.

Key resources

Cholera

- [WHO](#), cholera outbreaks, Q&A
- [VFA](#), cholera social media toolkit
- [Global Task Force on Cholera Control](#), clarifying rumours and community concerns.
- [SSHAP](#), key considerations: socio behavioural insight for community- centred cholera preparedness and response in Mozambique, 2023
- [SSHAP](#), social, behavioural and community dynamics related to the cholera outbreak in Malawi, 2022

Malaria

- [WHO](#), Annual malaria report spotlights the growing threat of climate change
- [WHO](#), Annual world malaria report 2023
- WHO [initiative](#) to stop the spread of *Anopheles stephensi* in Africa
- [VFA](#), Malaria social media toolkit
- WHO malaria fact [sheet](#)
- Malaria threat [map](#)
- Malaria Social & Behavior Change Communication National [Strategies](#)

Anthrax

- [WHO](#), anthrax, Q&A
- [WHO](#), anthrax in Zambia
- [CDC](#), anthrax in Zambia
- [WHO](#), Guidelines for the surveillance and control of anthrax in humans and animals

Methodology

The social media listening process relies on a combination of social media analyses conducted for French, English, and Lusophone-speaking countries.

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.