

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

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AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

12-19 February, 2024

(Weekly report n°107)

Top concerns

[Cholera epidemic in Comoros highlights crisis of public confidence in healthcare institutions](#)

After the death of a child from cholera, widespread fear gripped many Comorians who refuse to go to the hospital, illustrating an accentuating distrust towards the healthcare staff.

[Mixed reactions accompany the announcement on the latest Lassa fever outbreak in Nigeria](#)

Commenters online exhibit mixed reactions following the announcement of the Lassa fever outbreak in Nigeria.

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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 February 12-19 in Africa.

For more information, please contact the WHO AIRA team: [Elodie Ho](mailto:Elodie.Ho@who.int) hoelodie@who.int

Cholera epidemic in Comoros highlights crisis of public confidence in healthcare institutions

Engagement: **40 interactions, 16 likes, 22 comments**

- In an [official communiqué](#) dated February 02, 2024, the Comoros Ministry of Health declared a cholera epidemic. The outbreak involved imported cases from Tanzania. 6 passengers on a boat showed symptoms of cholera. After laboratory analysis of the samples, the results were all positive.
- Comores-info.net reports that the situation has taken a [new twist with](#) the escape of a patient from a hospital, raising questions about confidence in the country's medical institutions.
- Testimonies collected by the same news outlet reveal a [widespread fear](#) of going to hospital, fuelled by cases of death perceived as avoidable.
- Crucial questions were raised after the [death of a child](#) suffering from cholera, whose mother felt that the treatment was faulty. The effectiveness of treatment, medical practices and communication between healthcare staff and patients are all questions that are widespread in the comments monitored.
- The authorities are called upon by online users to act swiftly to reassure the population, while guaranteeing efficient and humane care for patients.
- Some comments below (translated from French):

 It is the government which is responsible for the hospital equipment and unfortunately it does not provide enough favorable conditions to allow doctors to do their work.

No, the Comorians are not afraid of cholera, they do not trust the government.

Why is this worrying?

- The health system is seen by online commentators as unprepared to deal with the cholera outbreak.

- The situation has become alarming in view of the many deaths recorded across the country (6 deaths out of a total of 105 confirmed cases according to statistics from the [Ministry of Health](#) reported by France Info). Some comments show [fear of going to hospital](#), preferring to keep the sick at home.
- In a country where access to drinking water is a public health issue, with only 15% of the population having access to it according to the United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), the epidemic is reaching worrying proportions.
- Fear of contracting the disease is driving some Comorians to flee to other countries. [Mayotte](#) has also activated health controls at its borders to detect potential imported cases, and a passenger traceability system has been set up for those arriving by boat and by plane.

What can we do?

- Support efforts to strengthen the health system, including training of health care workers in case management and how to communicate/answer questions about cholera from patients and family members.
- Keep monitoring conversations, prioritizing the needs for information online and in communities.
- Identify the behavioral drivers and knowledge of the affected communities about cholera. Based on this assessment, develop a communication strategy and community engagement to address the gaps identified.
- Stories [of those who have been cured](#) can be powerful tools to address some fears, risk of stigma and convince people to seek care early.

Nigeria

Mixed reactions follow the latest Lassa fever outbreak announcement in Nigeria.

Engagement: **3 posts, 41 likes, 17 comments**

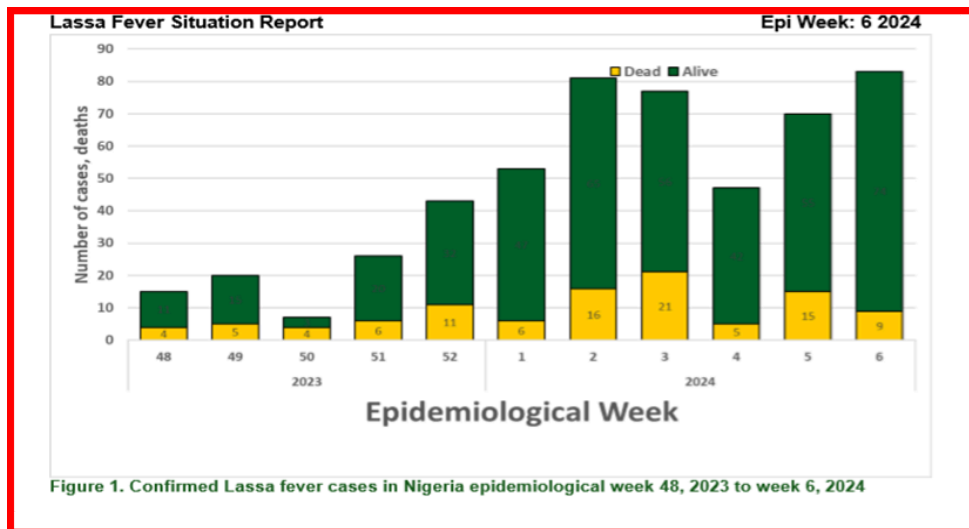
- Some online comments show the misinformation and conspiracies trailing the Channels Television station's [announcement](#) about the Lassa fever outbreak. A post from "Jada New-Pin" an online user on X accuses the media of fabricating lies about the outbreak.
- Some commenters expressed [acceptance](#) of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) guidelines and recommendations on Lassa fever prevention ([LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)).
- Expressions of [fears and uncertainty](#) about the Lassa fever outbreak are part of the online comments.

- An online influencer with 5k followers on X, [Jane Solomon](#), fears over the survival of Nigerians from the outbreak given the socio-economic conditions in the country.
- Online comments reflect [support](#) for Médecins sans frontières as they tackle the problem of misinformation with the Lassa fever outbreak in Nigeria.
- The sentiments show enthusiasm from online users to add their voices to spread positive [information](#) about the outbreak ([LINK](#)).
- The situation report on the [Lassa fever outbreak](#) in Nigeria by the NCDC has elicited satisfaction and confidence in online users commenting on the swift intervention of the agency.

Below are some of the comments:



Why is this concerning?



- The [situation report](#) from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) for epi week six (5-11 February 2024) shows that weekly deaths occurred during the past 10 weeks. Over the first six weeks of 2024, 72 deaths were reported, resulting in a case fatality rate (CFR) of 17.5%. This CFR is slightly lower than the 17.6% recorded in the same period of 2023 which raises concerns on the possibility of preventing future outbreaks.
- The outbreak has spread to different states of the country creating anxieties with the [recent deaths](#) from a military hospital in Kaduna, Nigeria. [[LINK](#)]

- [Lassa fever](#), an acute viral hemorrhagic illness, spreads through contact with infected rat droppings or bodily fluids. Severe cases hospitalized can be deadly with a 15% case fatality rate (CFR). Besides the main route of transmission through contaminated items, person-to-person and lab infections are also possible.

What can we do?

- Support the response activities of the NCDC in carrying out RCCE and Infodemic management activities to address misinformation and conspiracies.
- Accelerate proactive efforts to identify and track potential cases, including those who have not sought medical attention.
- Advise citizens to seek immediate medical attention for suspected cases as early diagnosis and treatment significantly improve their chances of recovery.

Trends to watch

Risk of respiratory illness and meningitis in Ghana due to weather conditions

- In a statement from the Ministry of Health [talking](#) about the health implications of the current weather conditions, the ministry speaks of "conditions that can lead to an increased risk of meningitis, as evidenced by reported cases of meningitis, although there is no epidemic in the country."
- For the GHS Deputy Director of Surveillance, [Dr Dennis Odai Laryea](#), a prolonged dry season would increase the risk of the disease.

Mauritius: dengue epidemic worsens

- [The number of patients doubled last week.](#) The thousand-case mark was passed on February 16. Mauritius's former Director of Health, Dr Gujadhur, [believes that the seriousness of the epidemic is being underestimated by the health authorities](#): "We're going to have an exponential increase in the number of sick people", he says. According to him, "the laboratories are overwhelmed, they can't give test results in less than 24 hours".

Key resources

- [OMS](#) : Cholera fact sheets (English)
- [Infographie OMS](#) : Choléra (anglais)
- [Infographie de l'OMS](#) : Kits Choléra
- [VFA](#) : Preventive measures against cholera
- [Groupe de travail mondial sur la lutte contre le choléra](#) : About cholera
- [BBC](#) : Cholera epidemic in Zambia
- [OMS](#) : Cholera epidemics, questions and answers
- [OMS](#) : a new determination to eradicate cholera in DR Congo

Lassa fever

- [WHO](#) : Lassa fever fact sheets
- [NCDC](#) : Lassa fever situation report, Nigeria

Dengue

- [WHO](#) : Dengue information sheets
- [WHO](#) : The global dengue situation
- [GAVI](#) : Dengue, vaccine profiles
- [Viral Facts Africa](#) : content on dengue

Meningitis

- [WHO](#) : Meningitis fact sheets
- [WHO](#) : SOP for surveillance, preparedness, and response to meningitis epidemics in Africa

Methodology

The social media listening process is based on a combination of social media analyses carried out for French-speaking, English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries. Moving from a single person's social media listening for the entire African region to a combined listening based on analysis by three different people can result in a less detailed and comprehensive report.

Switching from a single person's social media listening for the entire African region to a combined listening based on analysis by three different people may result in a less detailed and comprehensive report.

Engagements, also known as interactions, refer to the number of likes, comments, reactions and re-shares of a post.

It is not a perfect measure of engagement;

Some may have seen the message and chosen not to interact with it; Commenting on or re-sharing a message may be a more meaningful form of engagement than simply reacting to it;

We don't systematically distinguish between the types of response each engagement generates (for example, if a message contains misinformation, people may counter or debunk it in comments).

We seek to mitigate these limitations by

Analyzing comments and monitoring reactions to qualitatively assess responses to each post;

- We evaluate the speed of a message (i.e. how quickly it gets reactions, "likes" and shares) and the reappearance of specific themes.
- Identify whether the message is being shared on a variety of platforms and sources (broad engagement), or whether it simply solicits a high level of attention within a given community/platform (siloeed engagement).
- Tracking reports are produced using NewsWhip Analytics, Crowdtangle, Google Trends and UNICEF Talkwalker dashboards, as well as WHO's weekly EPI-WIN reports and WHO's EARS platform.
- As a result, data may be biased towards data from official news outlets or official social media pages, and do not include content circulating on closed platforms (e.g. Whatsapp) or groups (e.g. private Facebook groups).

To develop these summaries and recommendations, we consulted community feedback survey reports, as well as follow-up and recommendations from AIRA partners.

We also drew on the WHO's weekly EPI-WIN reports and UNICEF's monthly UNICEF's monthly reports to formulate our recommendations. As we produce more content, we seek to triangulate and corroborate information between these groups to strengthen our response to infodemic.