

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

11-18 March 2024

Weekly brief #111

Top concerns

[Significant disparities in the levels of trust in healthcare professionals between Grande Comore island and Anjouan island within the Union of Comoros.](#)

While we documented a lack of trust in local health authorities and medical personnel in Grand Comore island, individuals of Anjouan island debunked misconceptions that cholera doesn't exist in the Union of the Comoros.

[Red eye spreads in Africa, with cases confirmed in Uganda](#)

Questions and misinformation around appropriate treatment for highly contagious Red eye disease shared in Angola, Mozambique and Uganda.

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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 March 11-18 in Africa.

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Union of the Comoros

Significant disparities in the levels of trust in healthcare professionals between Grande Comore island and Anjouan island within the Union of Comoros.

Engagement: 27 posts, 1535 likes, 338 comments

Grand Comore island

- ❑ CMM Comores, an online news agency boasting 96,000 followers on Facebook, has reported that Yazid Chakir Mladjao, a 16-year-old teenager, passed away on 26 February from [complications related to his treatment at the cholera treatment center](#). His family filed a complaint for medical negligence.
- ❑ A total of 58 online users commented on the post, with the majority voicing concerns about negligence in local hospitals, including the [lack of professionalism](#) of medical personnel in the emergency department, the triage site for patients showing signs of cholera and a [lack of trust in el Maarouf National hospital center](#). They criticized local health authorities for overlooking the importance of affordable healthcare and shared [personal experiences](#) of similar neglect encountered in hospitals. Below are some comments translated from French:

I can understand Yazid's family's argument, because on two occasions, I experienced the same kind of negligence in the emergency department, and yet it wasn't cholera, but mad cow disease that caused vomiting and severe dehydration.

I am so sorry for the loss of such a young boy.
After poor medical care, in what state did this child arrive at the hospital?

Tafadali, ELMANROUF is a mortuary hospital. If you're a bit ill when you get to Elmanrouf, you've got just 1 hour to say goodbye to your family. We all know that Elmanrouf.....

Victims of negligence at the CHN El Maarouf or in health structures in the Comoros, there are some every day. Except that no one dares to talk about it or lodge a complaint 😞, and the few people who do dare to lodge a complaint find themselves up against the "justice" system, which hushes up every case.

- Another article by Al-watwan with 56,000 followers on Facebook garnered 14 comments from online users concurring with [allegations of negligence on the part of medical personnel](#).

Anjouan island

- In Anjouan Island, interviews with patients and their relatives yielded positive responses about the cholera outbreak response. For example, [a husband debunked the misconception that cholera doesn't exist](#), stating, "prior to my wife falling ill, I too dismissed the existence of the cholera epidemic. However, having witnessed firsthand what we've endured, I can affirm the harsh reality of this disease."
- Another patient attested to the [appropriate care provided by the medical staff at Hombo Anjouan Hospital](#), noting that he is currently progressing well in his recovery and experiencing improved health.

Why is it concerning?

- The [World Bank reports](#) that the population of the Union of Comoros has long "suffered from insufficient healthcare services", including shortages in medicines, equipment, infrastructure, and qualified healthcare professionals.
- [UNICEF highlights](#) that the recent cholera outbreak in the Union of Comoros, declared on 2 February 2024, is the first cholera outbreak in the country since 2007.
- The death of a 16-year-old teenager due to cholera has the potential to exacerbate the reluctance among parents and caregivers to seek medical care for their children promptly. The lack of trust in the healthcare system can lead to significant delays in seeking medical treatment, which in turn can result in a higher number of fatalities. Since the death of the teenager, many patients have preferred to opt for treatment at private health facilities instead of public ones.
- The Union of Comoros, an archipelagic country, is formed by three islands: Ngazidja (Grande Comore), Mwali (Mohéli), and Ndzwani (Anjouan). As per the latest [Union of Comoros situation report on cholera](#), Ngazidja reported 214 cumulative cases, the highest number among all islands. The Case Fatality Rate (CFR) is 4.7%, which is [considered high by international standards](#).

What can we do?

- Continue media monitoring the response to the cholera outbreak in all islands of the Union of Comoros and promptly address any misinformation or concerns that arise from online and offline sources, collaborating closely with healthcare workers.
- Advocate for the strengthening of the capacities of health personnel deployed in the patient triage site at the El-maarouf national hospital centre where the teenager died due to alleged medical negligence, and for building the capacity of health workers deployed in the Cholera Treatment Centres (CTC).
- To foster trust in medical professionals treating cholera, it is imperative to ensure that all essential supplies, including treatment kits, are readily available and adequately stocked at the CTCs.
- Tailor RCCE (risk communication and community engagement) messages to the unique context of each island, ensuring relevance as the disease progresses.
- Promote increased information sharing between health authorities and online media agencies to mitigate the risk of misinformation and share updated information as the disease evolves.

Mozambique, Angola, Uganda

Red eye spreads in Africa, with cases confirmed in Uganda

Engagement: **26 posts, 24K likes, 1413 comments**

Uganda (Level of engagement: 13 FB posts, 1X post, 73 comments)

- The Ministry of Health in Uganda shared a press release on X on 14 March about [an ongoing outbreak of conjunctivitis in two divisions of Kampala city, Nakwa and Rubaga](#) and 8 prison facilities in the country.
- The [Kampala Capital City Authority \(KCCA\)](#) has also issued a warning to all head teachers and principals of both government and private education institutions in the city, about the outbreak. KCCA asked for the reactivation of existing infection prevention measures in schools.
- Two online users [raised questions regarding appropriate treatments](#) in a Facebook post by Capital FM Uganda.

Am facing swelling if eye ball, what should I do please. What treatment should I take please

So wats the treatment

- Other online users expressed curiosity about the [cause of the disease](#) and speculated about the [possibility of a school lockdown in Kampala](#).
- Similar reactions were monitored between Ugandan responses and Kenyan reactions at the end of January when news emerged about [Mombasa County issuing alerts regarding red eye infections](#).
- Some online users asked about the [cause of the disease](#), and [how the disease is transmitted](#), and raised questions regarding the [need for a lockdown](#).

Mozambique (Level of engagement: 7 FB posts, 648 comments)

- Due to close contacts, semi-collective Nacala-Porto transporters, as TV Sucesso Moz reported, are [denying boarding individuals with conjunctivitis](#). Some individuals featured in the video are labeling it as discrimination, while online users are suggesting wearing sunglasses and expressing anxiety about how to proceed with daily life.
- The same Facebook post includes a statement from a medical professional at the ophthalmology service of Hospital Geral de Nacala, cautioning against self-medication with inappropriate eye drops that may cause eye irritation.
- Awareness sessions about conjunctivitis are being conducted at [Al Hidayah Mosque](#), emphasizing that it is forbidden (haram) to spread the disease knowingly while infected.

Angola (Level of engagement: 6 FB posts, 710 comments)

- In AIRA report [110](#), Angolan health minister Silvia Lutucuta alerted families nationwide about the danger of using home remedies to treat hemorrhagic conjunctivitis.
- [Saúde e Vida com Produtos Naturais Angola](#), a health and beauty Facebook page boasting 198k followers, asked its audience about natural and fast treatments for conjunctivitis.
- Out of 62 online users, 10% brought up natural remedies we have previously addressed, such as treating hemorrhagic conjunctivitis with urine or breast milk. Below are translated comments from Portuguese.

First urine of the day is shot and fall..

I washed it in ninety-something, until today I never caught it.

Dilute a little honey in physiological serum and apply the mixture several times a day in compressions placed over the eyes reduces eye inflammation. Breast milk can be applied purely in the eyes of babies with conjunctivitis.

I treated my conjunctivitis with only fresh water I washed my face several times a day with only fresh water

Breast milk is very effective!

Why is it concerning?

- As per the [Ugandan Ministry of Health](#), conjunctivitis is characterized by the inflammation of the mucous membrane that covers the white part of the eyeball and lines the eyelids. Various factors, such as viral infections, seasonal allergies, bacterial infections, and reactions to eye medications can cause it. Conjunctivitis is known to be highly contagious.
- Despite local scientists debunking the notion that urine cures conjunctivitis, some individuals believe in its efficacy and share their testimonials. This echo chamber effect can perpetuate the usage and acceptance of urine as a treatment despite scientific evidence to the contrary.

What can we do?

- Highlighting the dangers associated with using unproven treatments through radio segments, Facebook posts of medical centers, and flyers is crucial. [Liquids such as urine or breast milk can pose significant risks due to the high likelihood of bacterial contamination](#). Introducing these substances into the eye, particularly in children, can lead to severe eye complications, including serious infections like gonorrhoeae. [More information on conjunctivitis is detailed in the fact sheet of the CDC](#).
- Select trusted health sources, including health expert influencers or medical doctors or community leaders, to disseminate the right information about the cause, the mode of transmission and the treatment of the disease.

Persistent trends

A total of 15 children succumb to meningitis following South Sudan's heatwave alert

Engagement: **2 posts, 345 likes, 42 comments**

- On 14 March, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry issued [an extreme heat advisory](#), projecting temperatures to soar between 41 and 45 degrees Celsius over the subsequent two weeks across Juba and other parts of South Sudan.
- On 15 March, the National Ministry of health reported [the death of at least 15 children due to meningitis and exposure to heatwaves](#).
- Information Minister Michael Makuei Lueth emphasized that the prolonged persistence of the heatwave could compel the government to consider closing schools as a precautionary measure.
- On 16 March, the South Sudanese Ministry of Health issued a press statement addressing [the consequences of prolonged exposure to extreme heat waves on public health](#).
- In this regard, the ministry advocated for the temporary closure of all schools, effective as of Monday, 18 March, and the restriction of children from engaging in outdoor activities.
- This marks the second instance where heat waves have triggered cases of meningitis among children.
- In [AIRA report 106](#), we highlighted Ghana's escalating temperatures and heightened alert regarding a potential outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis in the northern region. Subsequently, in [AIRA report 108](#), we reported the death of a high school student due to complications from cerebrospinal meningitis.

Measles vaccination in Burkina Faso receives praise online

Engagement: **10 posts, 1959 likes, 37 comments**

- The Minister of Health and Public Hygiene, Dr. Robert Lucien Jean-Claude Kargougou, launched the national vaccination campaign against measles and rubella on Friday, March 15, in Gourcy.
- The campaign's launch has garnered commendation from online users, expressing appreciation to the authorities for their efficiency, the German [NGO HELP](#), as well as extending gratitude to the health workers.

Trends to watch

Resurgence of cases of hepatitis E in Sudanese refugee camps in Chad

Engagement: **10 posts, 261 likes, 14 comments**

- The [Ministry of Public Health in Chad](#) announced on Facebook its efforts in drafting strategic response documents to coordinate and consolidate actions against the Hepatitis E epidemic in the Ouaddaï province.
- Doctors Without Borders Western and Central Africa further emphasized that [the refugee camps suffer from a severe lack of hygiene infrastructure](#). In the Adré camp, there is only one latrine available for every 677 people, and in the Metché camp, there is only one latrine for every 225 people.

Two confirmed cases of Mpox in Liberia

- The [National Public Health Institute of Liberia](#) reported two confirmed cases of Mpox in Tappita district, Nimba county. There is no epidemiological link between both cases.
- As of now, there has been no online engagement regarding the topic, but since the last cases were reported in [2022](#), continuous monitoring of the conversations online and offline can help detect and address the concerns and questions raised by the population early.

Key resources

Malaria

- [WHO](#), Q&A on malaria vaccines (RTS,S and R21) (English and French)
- [WHO Infographic](#): the RTS,S Malaria Vaccine (English)
- [WHO Infographic](#): the RTS,S Malaria Vaccine (French)
- [WHO](#), annual world malaria report 2023
- [VFA](#), malaria social media toolkit
- [Gavi](#), briefing on start of routine malaria vaccinations in Africa 19 January
- [WHO](#), Malaria: The malaria vaccine implementation programme (MVIP)

Cholera

- [WHO](#), global strategic preparedness, readiness and response plan for cholera 2023 2024

- [SSHAP](#), guidance note on community engagement for cholera outbreak response in the east and southern Africa ([ENG](#), [FR](#), [POR](#))
- [The collective service](#), cholera question bank for community level data collection
- [WHO](#), cholera Q&A
- WHO, Cholera RCCE key message bank ([ENG](#), [FR](#), [POR](#))
- [VFA](#), cholera toolkit

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 (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.