

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

18-25 March 2024

Weekly brief #112

Top concerns

[A first case of cholera detected in Mayotte \(France\), imported from the Union of Comoros](#)

The detection of the first imported case of cholera in Mayotte sparks concerns about the potential spread of the disease to Madagascar and prompts heightened transmission alerts between the islands.

[Confirmed cases of meningitis in Mali exacerbate the interdependence of health and climate systems](#)

Reports from AIRA have underscored the prevalence of meningitis cases in Nigeria, Ghana, South Sudan and now Mali, accentuating how climate change has worsened the conditions favourable for meningitis outbreaks.

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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 18-25 in Africa. For more information, please contact the WHO AIRA team: Elsa Maria Karam karam@who.int, Elodie Ho hoelodie@who.int.

Union of the Comoros, Mayotte, Madagascar

A first case of cholera imported from the Union of Comoros to Mayotte, one of the overseas departments of France

Engagement: 19 posts, 4434 likes, 590 comments

Mayotte (4 posts, 56 likes, 13 comments)

- On 19 March 2024, the prefect of Mayotte reported the [first imported confirmed case of cholera](#) on the island.
- The patient is [a woman who arrived from Anjouan](#), an island of the union of the Comoros, on 17 March by kwassa, the Comorian name for a type of fast fishing boat. The woman resides in a village in the commune of Mamoudzou, the capital city of Mayotte.

Union of the Comoros (13 posts, 2644 likes, 382 comments)

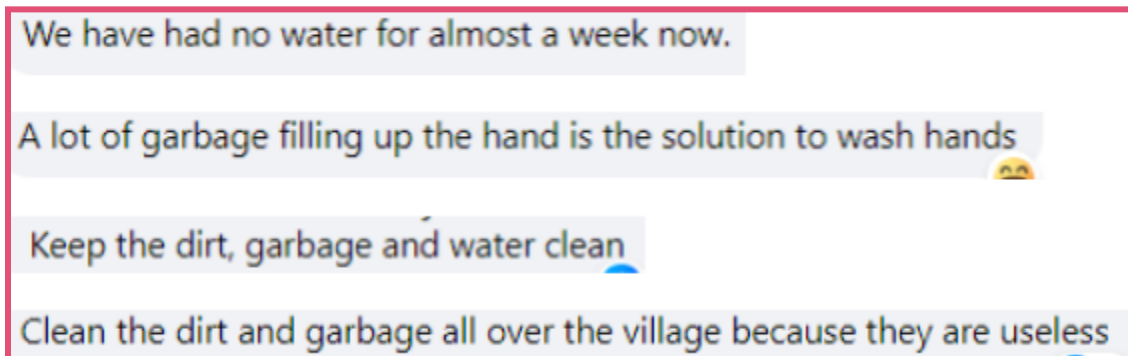
- A total of 13 posts related to cholera in the Comoros have been monitored including 10 posts by online media agencies and 3 by UNICEF.
- Across all Facebook posts, there are debates between online users whether cholera really exists in Comoros or not. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
- For example, in a [Facebook post by a Comorian content creator](#), she queried her followers about their thoughts on the existence of cholera in Comoros. Out of 52 comments, some online users expressed doubts and uncertainty, but most responses indicated acknowledgment of the presence of cholera.

Madagascar (2 posts, 1734 likes, 195 comments)

- 24h Mada, a page owned by a Malagasi journalist whose identity is not mentioned on the Facebook page, shared [health precautions currently being implemented at the airport in Madagascar](#) to prevent the spread of cholera.

Online users who commented on the post voiced their concerns about the accumulation of garbage and the lack of access to clean water.

Below are some examples:



- Vaovao Farany - Fil d'Infos - Ofisialy, a Malagasi online media agency with 487k followers, garnered the attention of 94 online users about cholera updates in the region. A user expressed inevitability, warning that [if cholera reaches Madagascar, it could result in significant casualties](#). Another user dismissed cholera as a [fictional disease](#), viewing it solely as a means for profit.

Why is it concerning?

- According to the [first humanitarian situation report by UNICEF Comoros country office](#), the ongoing cholera outbreak also poses a risk for transmission to neighbouring islands including Mayotte and Madagascar.
- According to [the Disaster Response Emergency Fund \(DREF\) report by IFRC](#), “cholera is not an endemic disease in the Comoros. The most recent epidemics date back to 1999, 2002, and 2007 and were caused by imported cases”.
- According to [the latest situation report on cholera by the Ministry of Health in the Union of the Comoros](#), since the outbreak was declared on 2 February, a total of 480 positive cases (rapid diagnostic test) and 14 deaths have been reported, a total of 428 cases have recovered and 39 patients remain at treatment sites.
- According to the [weekly bulletin of European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\)](#), “there is frequent undocumented population movement between the Comoros archipelago and the French territory of Mayotte. No cholera cases have been recorded in Mayotte since 2000”. With boats coming from the Comoros to Mayotte, there might be concerns about the potential impact on the transportation and fishing industries.

- The Malagasy Ministry of Interior and Decentralisation announced the [temporary suspension of all shipping from the Comoros in early February](#) due to the "resurgence of cases of cholera in the Comoros and Mozambique".

What can we do?

- Activate social listening initiatives in Madagascar to proactively monitor and detect any development related to cholera outbreaks in neighbouring countries and emerging concerns from online users.
- Deploy community health volunteers at busy ports in Comoros to disseminate awareness messages, distribute health kits with cholera information, and install handwashing stations to promote improved hygiene practices for travellers heading to other islands within the Union of the Comoros, Mayotte or Madagascar.

Mali

Confirmed cases of meningitis in Mali exacerbate the interdependence of health and climate systems

Engagement: **6 posts, 392 likes, 3 comments**

- TM1 TV, a Malian television channel, reported [cases of meningitis detected in Gao and Bamako](#). In Gao, the strain identified is Neisseria meningitis serogroup C, while in Bamako, it is Neisseria meningitis serogroups X and W135.
- Dr. El Hadj Amagulre, an epidemiologist and physician interviewed by the channel, highlighted that this period from March to June, coinciding with the drought season, marks the peak season for meningitis transmission, and that the alert threshold has not been reached.
- As reported by [bamako.com](#), Dr. Gassaga Sissoko, head of the epidemiological surveillance at the Gao regional health directorate, emphasises the importance of seeking medical attention at health centres if individuals experience any symptoms.

Why is it concerning?

- Previous reports from AIRA have highlighted the incidence of meningitis outbreaks in [Nigeria](#), [Ghana](#), and [South Sudan](#) in which climate change has exacerbated the conditions conducive to meningitis outbreaks. The emergence of meningitis in Mali underscores the interconnectedness of health and climate systems.

- According to [WHO](#), “Neisseria meningitidis, causing meningococcal meningitis, is the one with the potential to produce large epidemics.”
- According to [WHO](#), “the extended meningitis belt of sub-Saharan Africa, stretching from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the east (26 countries) and including the northern part of Nigeria, has the highest disease rates. Meningitis in these countries follows a seasonal pattern, being most common during the dry season (December through June) with a peak between March and April, when there is persistent low air humidity and high dust loads that are believed to damage the pharyngeal mucosa and ease the colonisation of the nasopharyngeal epithelium by the meningococci. Seasonal epidemics vary in size from year to year”.
- [Insecurity challenges](#) and an arid climate in Gao also represent a barrier to access vaccination and health services in the Gao region.
- According to the CDC, “[Neisseria meningitidis has caused several large outbreaks both within and outside the meningitis belt in the past several years](#)”. In fact, according to the [latest situation report from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control \(NCDC\)](#) on meningitis, some of the reported meningitis in Jigawa and Katsina cases were also caused by Neisseria meningitidis.
- According to the [internews information needs assessment of Gao in Mali](#), “**high levels of mobility and complex population movements are particularly present in Gao, a north-eastern Malian city that has traditionally functioned as a bridge between sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb**”.

What can we do?

- Advocate for increased attention to meningitis in drought-prone regions within the meningitis belt, including [vaccination](#) and early prevention. Advocacy efforts in Gao could involve distributing SMS messages containing preventive measures tailored in different languages. Additionally, informing local and traditional leaders to disseminate information about the danger of arid and hot climate and its impact on health (including risk of meningitis) during religious gatherings can effectively reach a wide audience.

Persistent trends

A total of four children succumb to diphtheria in Kano, Nigeria

Engagement: **11 posts, 1896 likes, 103 comments**

- A total of four children in different villages of the Mingibir Local Government Area of Kano State have succumbed to diphtheria according to [Premium Times Nigeria](#).
- Local authorities in Kano state have urged traditional rulers and Islamic scholars to provide more awareness about the disease in the communities.
- The NCDC has refuted misinformed beliefs suggesting that [the disease is a punishment from God](#) on its Facebook page.
- The Northern region of Nigeria has faced stigma regarding [poor hygiene and sanitation](#), often associated with disease prevalence.

Young man blinded after use of traditional medicine to treat hemorrhagic conjunctivitis in Quelimane, Mozambique

Engagement: **7 posts, 3143 likes, 583 comments**

- On 20 March, O Pais, a prominent Mozambican online news outlet, reported that [a Mozambican has lost his sight](#) after resorting to traditional remedies, including the use of urine, in an attempt to treat hemorrhagic conjunctivitis.
- In a Facebook post by Jornal Alerta, a Mozambican online news channel established in 2020, [certain online users contend that the loss of sight wasn't caused by urine but rather by traditional treatments](#). They argue that urine has been used by many people in the past without resulting in blindness.

Trends to watch

Ahead of pilot of malaria vaccine rollout in Nigeria, monitor anti-vaxx figures and online vaccine acceptance

Engagement: **6 posts, 340 likes, 29 comments**

Social media commentary

- The Daily Post reported that [the federal government of Nigeria has revealed its intention to roll out the malaria vaccine in Kebbi and Bayelsa states before the year's end](#). Following this initial phase, the program will gradually extend to other regions across the country. The statement does not specify which malaria vaccine is referred to.
- Channels Television featured an [interview with the coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Prof. Muhammad Ali Pate](#), saying the malaria vaccine is expected to “be in the Nigerian market by the summer for this year”.

- On [X](#), UNICEF Supply announced that children in various African countries, including Nigeria, will receive the R21 malaria vaccine through UNICEF deliveries.

On the lookout

- Chris Oyakhilome, a Nigerian Pentecostal pastor leading a church with millions of followers and global branches, has been involved in the production and dissemination of anti-vaccine documentaries and sermons. Several of these documentaries explicitly claim that malaria is a manufactured crisis in Africa and allege that vaccines are part of a depopulation scheme targeting the world. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)] or the contrary by other online media agencies [[LINK](#)].
- [Pastor Chris](#) as he names himself on X has not been active on the platform since 2020. He is active on Facebook under the name [Pastor Chris oyakhilome teachings](#). He is featured in Ceflix TV is a Christian television network that provides religious programming, including sermons, teachings, and other content related to Christianity [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] discrediting the work of scientists about their knowledge of vaccines and a false narrative that the COVID-19 vaccine can alter one's DNA. A [debunk](#) by Reuters fact-checking unit is also available online from December 2020.
- A [discussion about the malaria vaccine](#) has been monitored on Facebook to assess the early vaccine acceptance of online users. A pharmacist encouraged vaccine uptake dispelling the myth that it is not a mark of "666/antichrist", which represents "[anti-god and antichrist](#)".

African media outlets amplify news about gene-editing technology to eliminate HIV virus from infected cells

Engagement: **14 posts, 20639 likes, 5804 comments**

- A press release from the [European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases](#) highlights a study conducted by a team of researchers in the Netherlands that demonstrates how "**CRISPR-Cas gene editing technology can be used to eliminate all traces of the HIV virus from infected cells in the laboratory**".
- According to the press release, these are preliminary findings and the study is at a premature stage to declare it a functional HIV cure. Clinical trials of 'cure' in humans to disable the HIV reservoir have not yet started.

- A total of 14 online media agencies from various countries including [Kenya](#), [Malawi](#), [Zambia](#) and [Angola](#).
- The prevailing sentiment among online users was optimism, with many expressing that the availability of this cure might dissuade people from adhering to protective measures.

Introduction of self-testing HPV brush in Kenya reveals need for more awareness about HPV for male users

Engagement: **6 posts, 924 likes, 100 comments**

- Citizen Digital reported that Cerba Lancet Kenya, a leading Kenyan laboratory with branches across Africa, has launched [a self-collection kit for women to test for Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\)](#). The kit is named Evalyn-Brush, designed to collect samples from the vagina.
- In addition to concerns about its [cost](#) and [accessibility](#), a majority of male users who commented on the Facebook post displayed limited knowledge about the HPV kit. One speculated that the test might determine a [child's DNA](#), labelling the test as a “deal breaker” for certain families. Online users who replied to these comments clarified that [it's actually a self-testing kit for detecting HPV](#).

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 (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.