

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



**AIRA Infodemic Trends Report**

**22-29 April 2024**

**Weekly brief #117**

# Top concerns

## [Flooding in East African countries heightens risk of waterborne and vector-borne diseases](#)

Major flash floods have occurred in Kenya, Ethiopia, Burundi and Tanzania resulting in loss of lives, properties and disruption of services. We are monitoring questions by community members but also risks of disease outbreaks.

## [Disinformation about biological warfare in Africa following declaration of Mpox epidemic in the Republic of Congo](#)

Circulating disinformation about the mpox epidemic in the Republic of Congo emerges from social media accounts who amplify anti-western sentiments and pro-Russian initiatives.

# 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 April 22-29 in Africa.

For more information, please contact the WHO AIRA team:

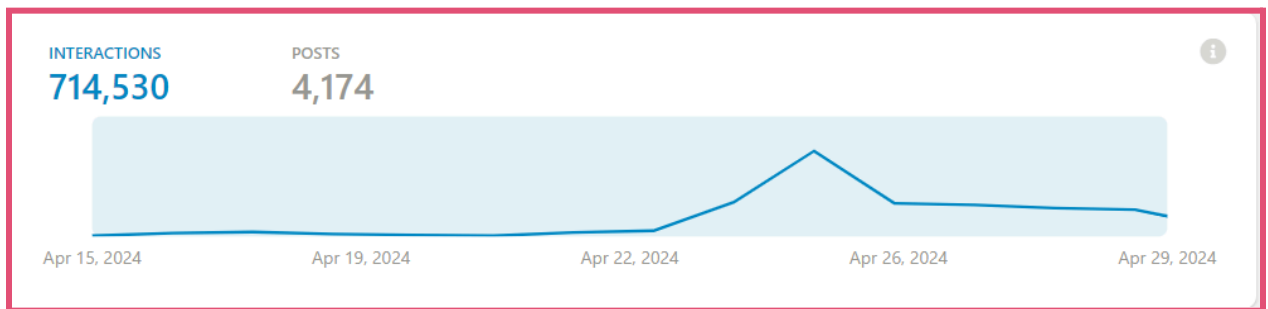
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## Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi, Ethiopia

### Flooding in East African countries heightens risk of waterborne and vector-borne diseases

Engagement: **4174 posts, 714,530 interactions**

- The frequency of social media posts regarding the recent floods began increasing on 22 April. According to data from Crowdtangle, over 4000 social media posts were shared in Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi and Ethiopia with a peak on 24 April when numerous regions of Nairobi, Kenya experienced flooding following a substantial downpour on the same day.



- Google Trends data indicates that among the related queries for all affected countries, there is a surge in searches for flash floods in Kenya, particularly in Nairobi.
- Discussions about **lack of disaster preparedness, poor infrastructure, unavailability of drainage systems, and impact on communities' livelihoods** (including food shortage and loss of life) were key themes highly discussed by online users. Videos and photos about the flash floods were shared on WhatsApp groups to alert individuals about potential risks and updates in their areas.
- Community members have been asking questions about what causes flash floods, especially whether they're linked to climate change or the El Nino phenomenon.

#### Why is it concerning?

- According to the [March-April-May \(MAM\) Rains Public Health Situation report 01](#) by the Ministry of Health in Kenya, "**Kenya is currently experiencing higher than expected March-April-May (MAM) rainfalls, resulting in flooding and the loss of lives, displacement of populations, and destruction of key**

**infrastructure.** Heavy urban flooding has also become frequent during the period. Kenya Meteorological Department forecast indicates heavy rainfall is expected to continue being experienced in most parts of the country especially Western, Central, Coast, Lower Eastern and North Eastern regions.”

- As [Kenyan doctors and other medical practitioners](#) working in public health facilities enter their fifth week of strike for better pay and working conditions, further delays in providing essential medical care to flood-affected communities would exacerbate health risks and potentially increase casualties.

### What can we do?

- Implementing [community protection](#) mechanisms include:
  - Monitoring updates on waterborne and other infectious diseases in flood-affected countries.
  - Providing updates on governmental social media platforms about the response measures being implemented in coordination with the ministries of health.
  - Share messages about health risks during/floods and how people can protect themselves in urban, rural and displacement settings.

## Republic of Congo

### Disinformation attributed to biological warfare in Africa following declaration of mpox epidemic in the Republic of Congo

Engagement: **4 posts, likes, comments**

- The [Minister of Health and Population](#) of the Republic of Congo declared on 23 April an epidemic of mpox.
- Grant Leaity, the UNICEF representative in the DRC, emphasised in a [tweet](#) that the communities most impacted are marginalised and endure various forms of deprivation.
- Two influential Facebook accounts, one revealing pro-Russian sentiments and the other advocating radical Pan-Africanist ideology, have recently disseminated information regarding the epidemic [[LINK](#),[LINK](#)]. Some of the followers have begun to assert that the epidemic is a form of biological warfare orchestrated by the West against Africans. Below are some comments:

The west is at it again!! Not only are they still their resources . Are also infesting them with biological weapons.

Thank God Russia is doing a good work there by treating people and helping them fight the western backed rebel.

It's them whom have released that sample out there in order to win the war in eastern Kongo. Kongo is suffering a lot, they are over 12 million deaths.

### Why is it concerning?

- The detection of mpox in the Republic of Congo comes three weeks after health experts held an emergency meeting in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo to develop strategies to prevent the disease from spreading in African countries. The fact that monkeypox has been detected shortly after an emergency meeting convened to prevent its spread suggests its potential for rapid spread within the continent, and the need for effective communication and coordination efforts to manage outbreaks and prevent their escalation.
- The emergence of disinformation regarding mpox in the Democratic Republic of Congo is a concerning development. Disinformation actors in Africa target online communities with a high anti-western sentiment and then attempt to infiltrate it by posting tailored influence content likely to resonate with its followers. They also post entertaining or non-controversial content to gain “insider” status and grow an online following that can make future manipulation efforts more successful. The number of shares online may not be significant at the moment; however, it is crucial to continue monitoring the situation closely.

### What can we do?

- Continue monitoring mpox-related news on social media platforms and WhatsApp groups to assess whether disinformation persists or dissipates over time.
- Set clear protocols to determine the relevance and impact of disinformation as well as appropriate response of the Ministry of Health, WHO, or other partners if needed.

## Trends to watch

### Benin, Liberia, Sierra Leone

In the context of Africa vaccination week, monitor malaria information gaps or hesitancy after vaccine launch

Engagement: **posts, likes, comments**

- Benin, Liberia and Sierra Leone launched on World Malaria Day a large-scale rollout of the [RTS,S malaria vaccine](#).
- From the online Facebook publications posted by health authorities [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] and UN agencies such as [WHO](#) and [UNICEF](#), comments showed a positive sentiment.
- Equipping healthcare workers with knowledge about the vaccine is key to the success of the malaria vaccine implementation programme, as directed by [WHO](#).

## Key resources

### Africa vaccination week

- [VFA](#), social media kit, Africa vaccination week

### 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](#))
- [SSHAP](#), Enhancing Community Engagement Through Data Collection: Controlling the Cholera Epidemic in Mozambique
- [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

### Mpox

- [WHO](#), Risk communication and community engagement readiness and response toolkit mpox
- [VFA](#), social media kit on mpox

## 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.