

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

8-15 July 2024

Weekly brief #127

Top concerns

[Regional inquiries: Questions on Dengue fever symptoms, transmission and prevention across Togo, Ghana, and Ivory Coast indicate possible information gap](#)

As dengue fever spreads in multiple countries across Africa, we monitored a few questions by online users asking about its symptoms, preventive measures to adopt and about the nature of the disease.

[Video from December 2023 makes rounds in the Democratic Republic of Congo after international singer Maitre Gims refuses to become an ambassador for polio vaccination campaigns](#)

An interview with Maitre Gims discussing his decision to decline the role of ambassador for a polio vaccination campaign in the DRC sparks conspiracy theories related to Bill Gates' involvement with vaccines in Africa and the influence of global figures in African health initiatives.

Reference Guide

[Regional inquiries: Questions on Dengue fever symptoms, transmission and prevention across Togo, Ghana, and Ivory Coast indicate possible information gap](#).....Pg. 3

[Video from December 2023 makes rounds in the Democratic Republic of Congo after international singer Maitre Gims refuses to become an ambassador for polio vaccination campaigns](#).....Pg.

Trends to watch

[Online users ask questions about the use of genetically modified \(GM\) mosquitoes to fight malaria in Kenya ahead of its prospective release](#).....Pg. 6

[Three children die of hepatitis A in Kenya](#).....Pg. 7

[Suspected cases of Mpox recorded by ministries of health in Chad and Eswatini](#).....Pg. 7

[Sierra Leone and The Gambia confirm polio cases](#).....Pg 8

[Key resources](#).....Pg. 8

[Methodology](#).....Pg. 8

Public Health Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This weekly report provides key highlights and operational recommendations based on social listening data from 8-15 July 2024 in Africa.

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Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast

Regional inquiries: Questions on Dengue fever symptoms, transmission and prevention across Togo, Ghana, and Ivory Coast indicate possible information gaps

Engagement: 13 posts, 1702 likes , 214 comments

- Two online users asked on a Facebook post by TV3 **Ghana**, a leading TV station with 4.1M followers on Facebook, what are the symptoms of dengue fever. Other users referenced the disease as an avenue for local authorities to gain financially, similarly to the COVID-19 pandemic. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
- Online users in **Togo** who commented on the Facebook post of Bonjour Yoto, a platform dedicated to information related to the Préfecture of Yoto in Togo, exhibited signs of worries about the dengue epidemic. A user asked whether a lockdown or masks are needed to prevent the disease. Other users asked where it is spreading exactly and what dengue fever is [[LINK](#)].
- The Facebook page “Investir en **Côte D’Ivoire**” recently highlighted the critical situation of the dengue epidemic in Ivory Coast. In response, an online user warned against relying on home remedies for treating dengue fever. Another user expressed concern that health authorities are not adequately communicating the dangers of the disease. Additionally, there were inquiries from users seeking information on preventive measures and its symptoms [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

Why is it concerning?

- Vulnerable population groups might be pushed towards unreliable sources of health information if their questions are not addressed. Healthcare workers might be best placed to address these questions.
- The lack of knowledge coupled with expected rainfall can exacerbate the dengue epidemic in communities because the Aedes mosquito breeds in objects containing water or collecting rainwater and can lay eggs even in a very small amount of water. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
- Some factors may have contributed to the significant increase in dengue cases in Africa over the past year. These include changes in climate, such as increased temperatures and altered rainfall patterns, the rapid urbanization and population growth in cities leading to overcrowded living conditions, and the movement of people. [[LINK](#)]

What can we do?

- Engage communities directly to understand their concerns and provide clear, evidence-based answers about the dengue epidemic in the country and preventive measures they can adopt.
- Highlight verifiable sources of information about dengue fever including trusted health communication actors, and ensure it is accessible to the population groups who need it.
- Organize an interview with a public health expert to clarify dengue symptoms, common misunderstandings such as self-medication and confusion with malaria.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Video from December 2023 makes rounds in the Democratic Republic of Congo after international singer Maitre Gims refuses to become an ambassador for polio vaccination campaigns

Engagement: **66K likes, 4559 comments, 1M views**

- A YouTube [video](#) titled “Loris Giuliano & GIMS en balade” published by the French web videographer and radio host, Loris Giuliano, has been shared widely across WhatsApp channels in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The show is known for its quirky videos, often featuring a popular host in humorous and exaggerated situations. Giuliano boasts 928K followers on Instagram and 162K subscribers on his YouTube channel.
- In the video, internationally renowned Congolese singer Maitre Gims reveals at minute 11:34 that Bill Gates sought his help “to vaccinate a large number of people in the DRC”. Gims said that “he would not compromise his faith and image for financial gain”, and that “nobody is vaccinated against polio in the Congo”.
- In a TikTok [post](#) by Loumoni actu music, a French-language channel that focuses on music news and updates, at least 30% of the comments commend and respect the singer's choice not to accept Gates' offer and criticize Bill Gates' intentions in Africa. Below are some comments in French:

bravo maître gims,tu es vraiment un vrai Homme

bravo Gims les congolais ne sont pas de cobayes

Bien joué Gims l'Afrique n'est pas un cobaye !!!

Bill Gates n a pas des intentions honorables , Maitre Gims a eu raison de proteger le coeur de l afrique merci à nos ancêtres 🤔🤔🤔🤔

Gims connais bien le fonctionnement de blanc contre les races noirs donc les africains, il a bien fait Gims on t aime .

- Comments on the original YouTube video are diverse, with many expressing appreciation for the entertaining interview between the host and Gims.

Why is it concerning?

- As of data reported until June 27, 2024, the [WHO/UNICEF Estimates of National Immunization Coverage \(WUENIC\)](#) indicate that Democratic Republic of the Congo has achieved 60% coverage for the third dose of DTP-containing vaccines in 2023.
- The promotion by Maître Gims of false information about polio vaccination in the DRC, coupled with his anti-vaccine stance, poses a significant risk to Congolese followers and his wider audience. This can undermine trust in vaccination efforts, which are critical for preventing the spread of diseases like polio.
- Online commentary that supports the singer's decision of not taking money to be part of the vaccination campaign reinforces conspiracies that Bill Gates is involved in suspicious activities related to vaccines.

What can we do?

- Just as soliciting celebrities as ambassadors for a public health cause can be a good practice, ensuring that communities who are actually affected by polio are having their needs met, through local grassroots approaches can also be effective.
- Organize an information campaign to explain the role of health ambassadors, giving examples of celebrities who have successfully supported vaccination campaigns. In the DRC, internationally-renowned Congolese musician Koffi Olomide has joined a COVID-19 campaign to raise awareness of the coronavirus by advocating a vaccine [\[LINK\]](#). The singer Fally Ipupa, has been actively involved in promoting health initiatives including polio eradication [\[LINK\]](#)

- Provide accurate, evidence-based information on the benefits of polio vaccination in other countries to build confidence including the success of vaccination programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo and their positive impact on public health.

Trends to watch

Kenya

Online users ask questions about the use of genetically modified (GM) mosquitoes to fight malaria in Kenya ahead of its prospective release

Engagement: **3 posts, 3913 likes, 1417 comments**

- According to issue [97 of the KEMRI bulletin](#), KEMRI welcomed a delegation from Imperial College London to discuss a potential collaboration on genetic approaches, specifically Gene Drive, to control malaria in Kenya.
- NTV Kenya and the Nation amplified the news on a consecutive basis [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]. The subject garnered a lot of attention by online users looking at the number of comments exceeding 1400 comments.
- In addition to concerns such as the use of African populations as guinea pigs for experimental drugs and vaccines or the depopulation of Africa, online users asked questions about GM mosquitoes, including about the experiment itself, how it will impact humans and the continued use of malaria preventive measures. Below are some examples extracted from the Facebook post of NTV Kenya shared on 14 July.

So are these mosquitoes going to eat the other mosquitoes? My other question are they still make that annoying noise and bite ??

What if the GM mosquitoes 🦟 metamorphose into carriers of a more complex strain of malaria?

So I don't need to use net???

Nobody has ever told us the significance of mosquito, what science is telling us are the consequences, be careful with foreign tests..

So are these mosquitoes going to eat the other mosquitoes? My other question are they still make that annoying noise and bite ??

Kenya

Three children die of hepatitis A in Kenya

- According to [an article](#) by the Standard, three children under the age of ten have died of Hepatitis A in Uasin Gishu county over the past three months. An additional ten cases have been identified, with a concentration in Ziwa, Soy sub-county, as reported by Abraham Serem, a member of the County Health Executive Committee.
- On World Hepatitis Day, observed on 28 July 28 every year, raising awareness of hepatitis encourages prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

Chad, Eswatini

Suspected cases of Mpox recorded by ministries of health in Chad and Eswatini

Engagement: 8 posts, 484 likes, 66 comments

- The Ministry of Health in Chad issued [a press release](#) regarding suspected cases of Mpox reported in six sanitary districts across the country. The document notes that human-to-human transmission appears to be limited.
- TchadInfos.com [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] and Toumai Web Medias [[LINK](#)] amplified the information on their Facebook pages. Online users asked whether it's [contagious](#) and the [preventive measures](#) to adopt.
- The Ministry of Health in Eswatini shared a [press release](#) on 9 July informing the public that a suspected case of Mpox has been recorded. The patient has a history of travel to Gauteng in South Africa where cases of Mpox have been recorded.
- Two online users commenting on the Facebook post from [Eswatini Observer](#) raised concerns about the readiness of local authorities to respond promptly and provide accurate diagnoses.

Sierra Leone, the Gambia

Sierra Leone and The Gambia confirm polio cases

Engagement: 2 posts, 67 likes, 0 comments

- The [National Public Health Agency in Sierra Leone](#) reported on 12 July its first “type 2 polio virus in three years”. The child is a four year old male from the capital Freetown.

- The [Ministry of health in the Gambia](#) has shared a press release on the same day declaring an outbreak of circulating vaccine derived polio virus type 2 (cVDPV2).
- There has been no recorded engagement from online users in either country at this stage.

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)
- [VFA](#), malaria social media toolkit
- [WHO](#), Malaria: The malaria vaccine implementation programme (MVIP)
- [WHO](#), Guidance framework for testing of genetically modified mosquitoes, second edition
- [UNICEF](#), Malaria vaccines: Questions and Answers on Supply, Price, and Market Shaping UNICEF Supply Division

Dengue

- [VFA](#), dengue social media toolkit
- [WHO](#), dengue global situation

Polio

- [WHO](#), Polio fact sheet
- [VFA](#) polio social media 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 and monitoring conducted by only one person for the entire African region, to a combined one based on 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 (siloed 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.

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.