

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



**AIRA Infodemic Trends Report**

**12-19 August 2024**

**Weekly brief #132**

# Top concern

## Emergence of conspiracy theories, pandemic fatigue, distrust in local and global health authorities, misinformation over mpox following WHO’s declaration of mpox as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern

Following Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus's announcement declaring mpox a public health emergency of international concern, online users across various African countries have spread misinformation. This includes false claims that mpox is a side effect of COVID-19, that WHO plans to impose a “mega lockdown,” and that health authorities—both local and global—are seeking to profit from health crises in the same way they did with COVID-19.

# Reference Guide

Emergence of conspiracy theories, pandemic fatigue, distrust in local and global health authorities, misinformation over mpox following WHO’s declaration of mpox as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern .....Pg. 3

Key resources.....Pg. 10

Methodology.....Pg. 10

## Public Health Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This weekly report provides key highlights and operational recommendations based on social listening data from 12-19 August 2024 in Africa.

For more information, please contact the WHO staff:

Elsa Maria Karam [karame@who.int](mailto:karame@who.int), Alhassan Ibrahim Pereira, [pereiraal@who.int](mailto:pereiraal@who.int)

**Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Mali**

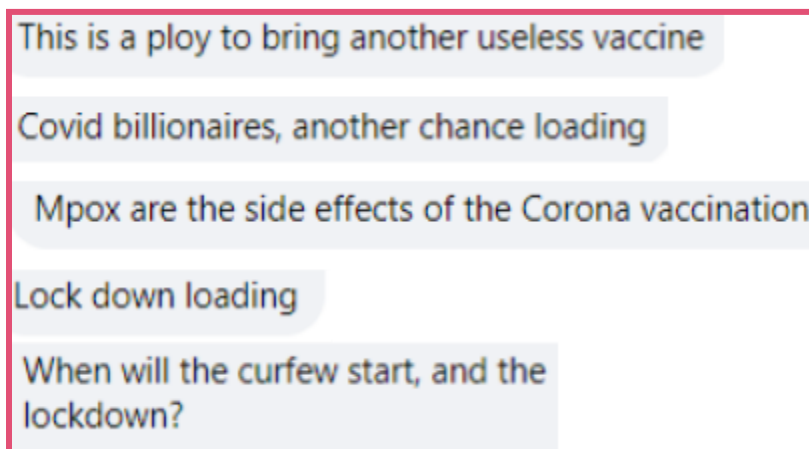
**Emergence of conspiracy theories, pandemic fatigue, distrust in local and global health authorities, misinformation over mpox following WHO's declaration of mpox as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern**

*WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has determined that the upsurge of mpox in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and a growing number of countries in Africa constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR).*[\[LINK\]](#)

**Kenya**

**Engagement: 11 posts, 6370 likes, 1557 comments**

- Online commentary indicates fear over the spread of the disease and lockdown measures, misinformation that mpox is a side effect of the COVID-19 vaccine, expecting a scenario similar to COVID-19 whereby vaccination is underway and that it's another opportunity for local authorities to allegedly profit from the outbreak. This is a screenshot of various comments across social media posts [\[LINK\]](#) [\[LINK\]](#)

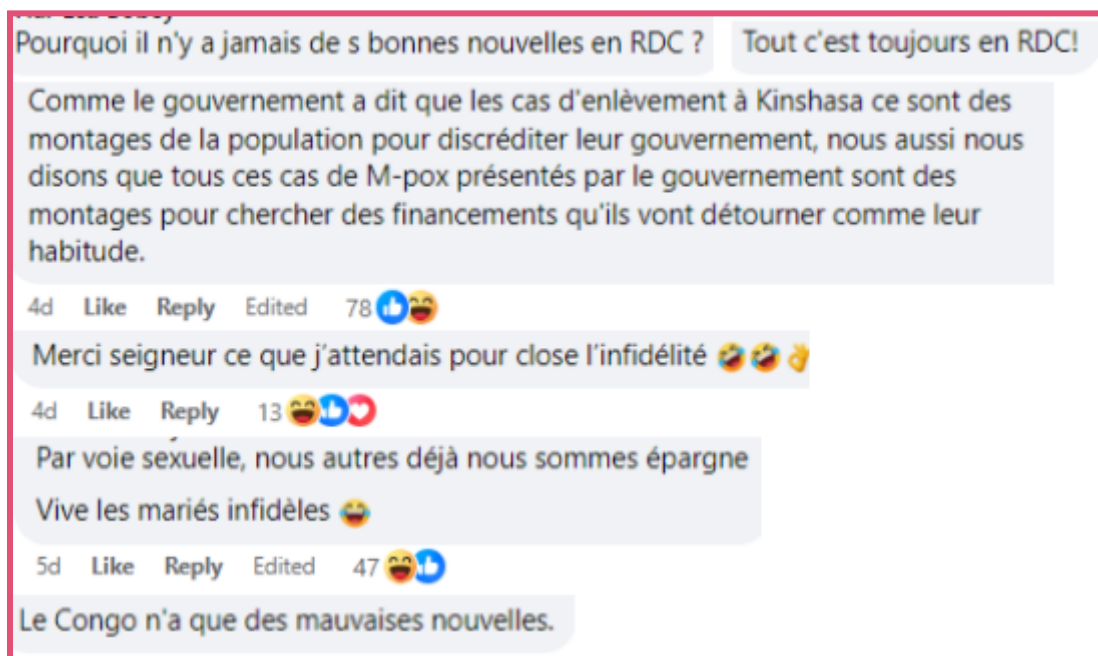


- Context:** Kenyan online media agencies report suspected mpox cases in Kiambu and Kisii counties [\[LINK\]](#), [\[LINK\]](#). The county government of Kiambu acknowledged the existence of a suspected case which is currently under laboratory investigation [\[LINK\]](#). There hasn't been any report from the Kisii county government online. However media reports indicate that the suspected case has been advised to remain isolated until results are available.[\[LINK\]](#)

## Democratic Republic of Congo

Engagement: **6 posts, 5293 likes, 1334 comments**

- We monitored Facebook posts by Mbote [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] and Pepele news [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)]. Both are digital news platforms based in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) boasting high influence on social media.
- On one hand, online users' reactions in the DRC indicate a mix of distrust in authorities, humor as a coping mechanism, skepticism about the real impact or seriousness of Mpox in their lives, sentiment of tiredness regarding the recurrence of outbreaks in the DRC. There are also questions about symptoms, preventive measures to be adopted.

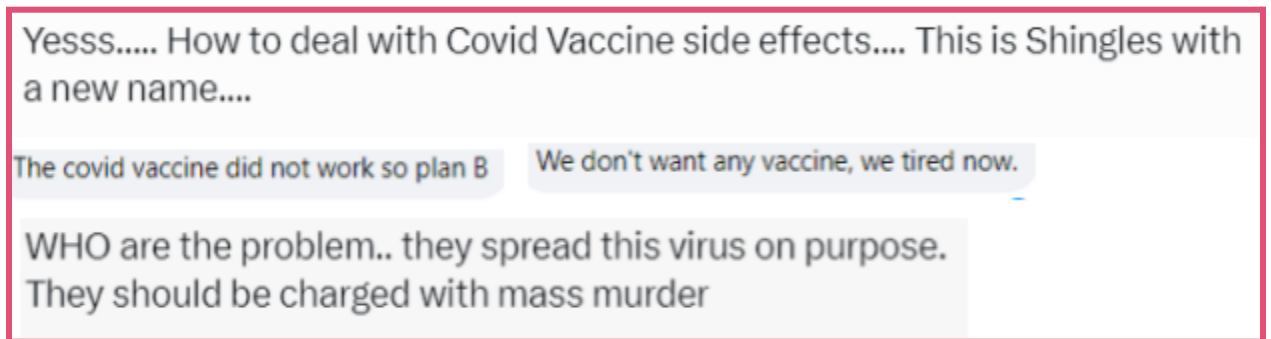


- On the other hand, videos promoting conspiracy theories implying that Bill Gates has ulterior motives that the mpox outbreak is being used as a pretext for mass vaccination are circulating in WhatsApp groups [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]. The videos recycle a viral clip from a popular artist that emerged in mid-July. The clip, highlighted in AIRA's report #127 [[LINK](#)], showcases the artist's decision to turn down the role of ambassador for a polio vaccination campaign in the DRC, and reinforces conspiracies that Bill Gates is involved in suspicious activities related to vaccines.
- Recycled content that shares anti-vaccine narratives reveals how sticky misinformation can be because it capitalizes on human psychology, emotions, and the tendency to trust familiar sources. In this case, the familiarity with the artist in the DRC.

## South Africa

Engagement: **6 posts, 1190 likes, 943 comments**

- Online commentary on eNCA News [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] and IOL news [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] is characterized by significant distrust towards global health authorities, with insinuations of their involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many comments promote vaccine hesitancy, frequently referencing COVID-19, and there is a prevalent belief that Mpox is a side effect of the COVID-19 vaccine. Comments are extracted from several of their X and Facebook posts: [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)].

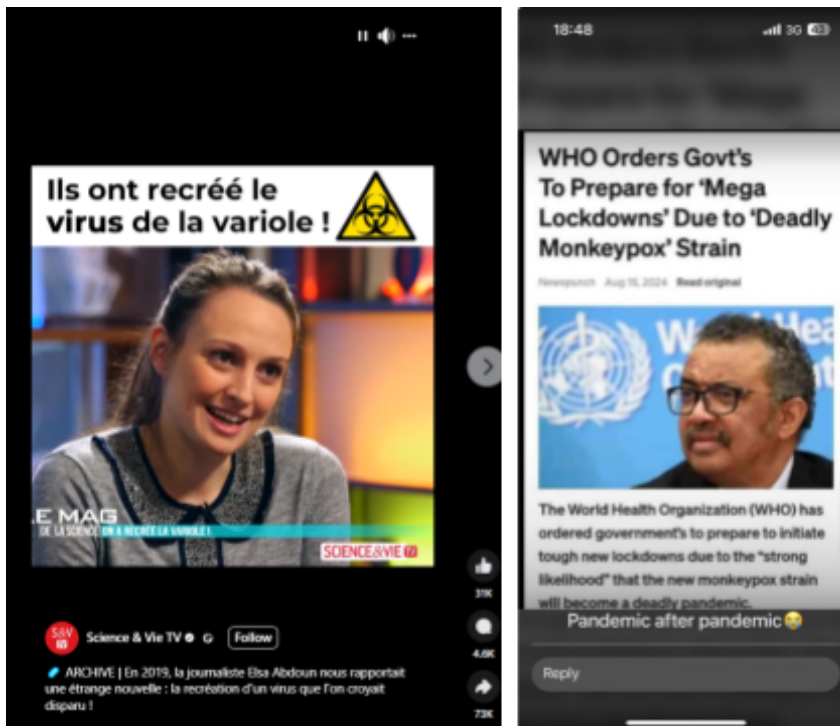


- Nigeria and Ghaneans online users also exhibit similar concerns with comments that highlight a distrust in local and global health authorities. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

## Togo, Mali

- The title “They recreated the virus of the pox” from a Science et Vie TV interview misled viewers into thinking the discussion is about mpox, which is relevant due to the current outbreak.
- **Debunk:** However, the interview actually covers the horse pox virus, which is extinct in the wild. The video has been shared multiple times across Togo and Mali. [[LINK](#)] A Science et Vie TV journalist refers to a controversial study in which Canadian researchers synthesized horse pox DNA, and packaged them into viral particles that were able to infect cells and reproduce. The
- "The [Canadian] team claims its work could lead to a safer, more effective vaccine against smallpox. But safe smallpox vaccines already exist, and there appears to be no market for a horsepox-based replacement” [[Opinion piece by Science.org](#) - [Original study](#)]

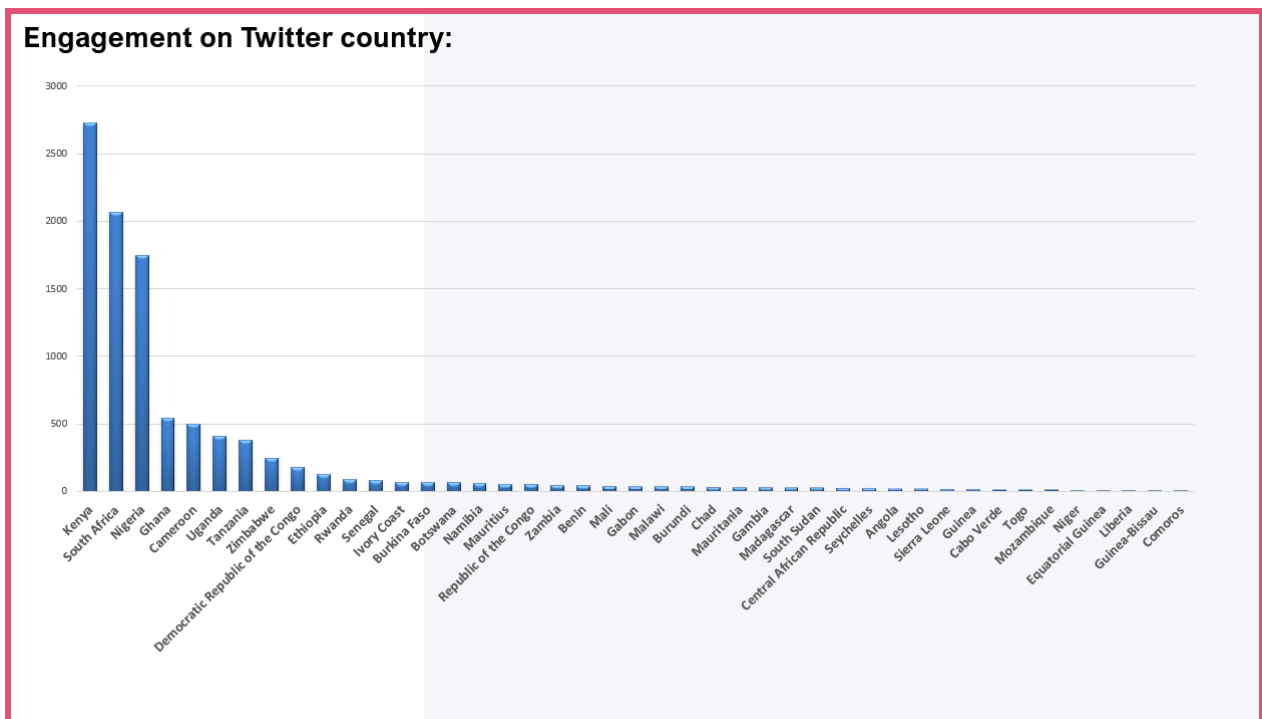
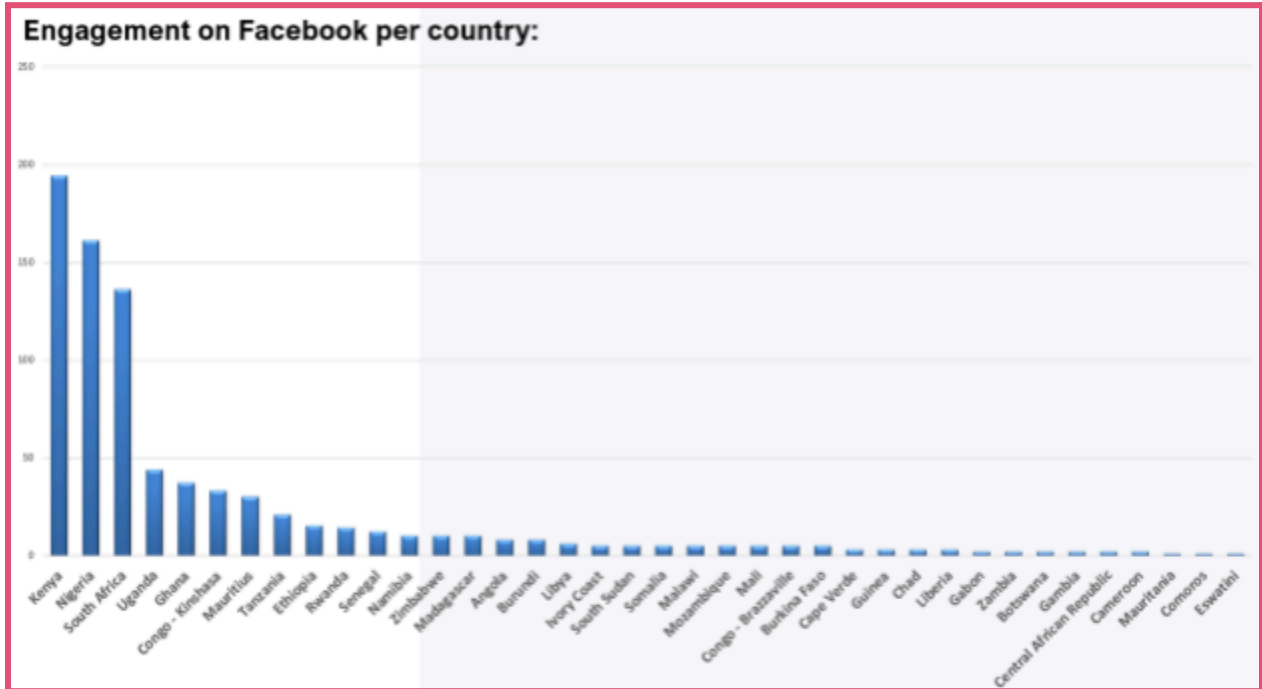
- A screenshot from a website called The People's Voice TV, which is known as an American fake news website, and presents misinformation as fact checked for readers with verification ticks, has falsely claimed that the World Health Organization (WHO) has ordered governments to prepare for large-scale lockdowns in anticipation of a new pandemic. [\[LINK\]](#)
- **Debunk:** The WHO has not and does not advise any kind of quarantine or lockdown for mpox. The WHO advises that individuals suspected or known to have mpox, or who may be a contact of a case, to adhere to measures to avoid exposing others. – Dr Samuel Boland, mpox Incident Manager, WHO AFRO



### Why is it concerning?

- The extensive media coverage of the mpox outbreak, combined with WHO's declaration that it is of international concern, has amplified anxiety associated with public health and social measures (lockdown, social distancing) and reawakened conspiracy theories associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (financial corruption, creation of disease to introduce vaccination). Online users are fueling widespread speculation, drawing on conspiracy theories that were prevalent during the pandemic's infodemic.
- Online engagement on Facebook and X is highest in Kenya, where one case of Mpox was confirmed and later recovered. Despite the more concerning cases being in the DRC, the most active discussions are happening in Kenya and South Africa. This suggests that Kenyan users are shaping the broader narrative

around Mpox discussions online. The Ministry of Health in Kenya has indicated that the threat level for Mpox in Kenya is low. [\[LINK\]](#)



**engagement on content with 'mpox' as a keyword on Facebook and X (Twitter) in the African region**

- The posts analyzed in the quantitative insights of this report represent a subset of the broader volume of content circulating about mpox. Predictive analytics reveals a significant surge in public engagement with this topic: interactions have surged by 574% this week compared to the previous week. This increase

indicates heightened public interest and underscores the need for accurate information and effective misinformation management not just across Africa.

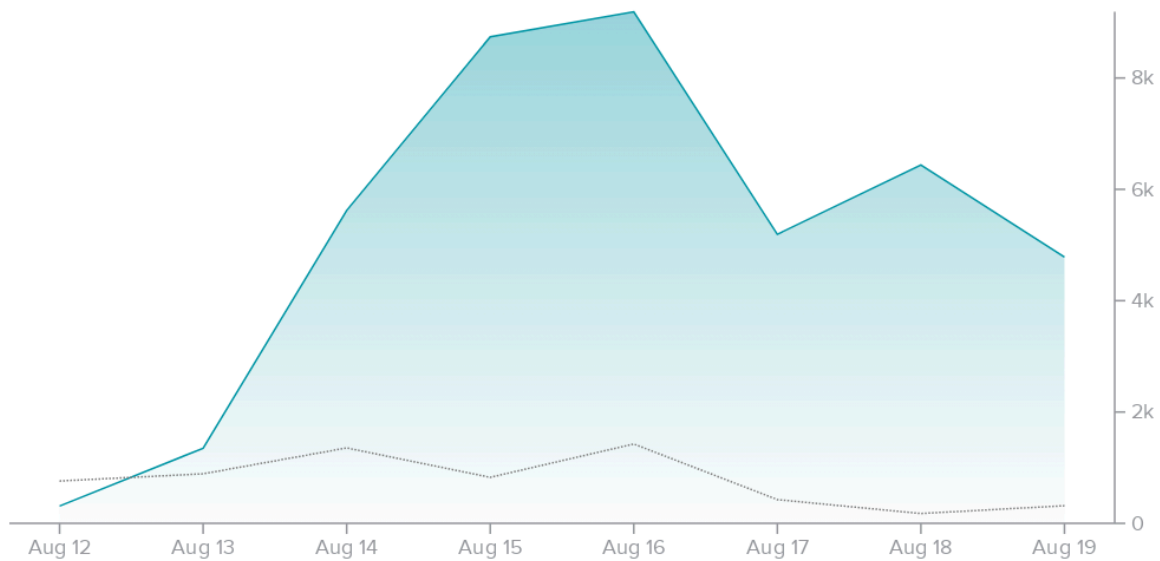
## Mpox

— Aug 12, 2024 • 12 AM - Aug 19, 2024 • 11:59 PM    ..... Previous period  
(Aug 5, 2024 • 12 AM - Aug 12, 2024 • 11:59 PM)

### Public Interest

**41.6k** Total interactions **↑574%**

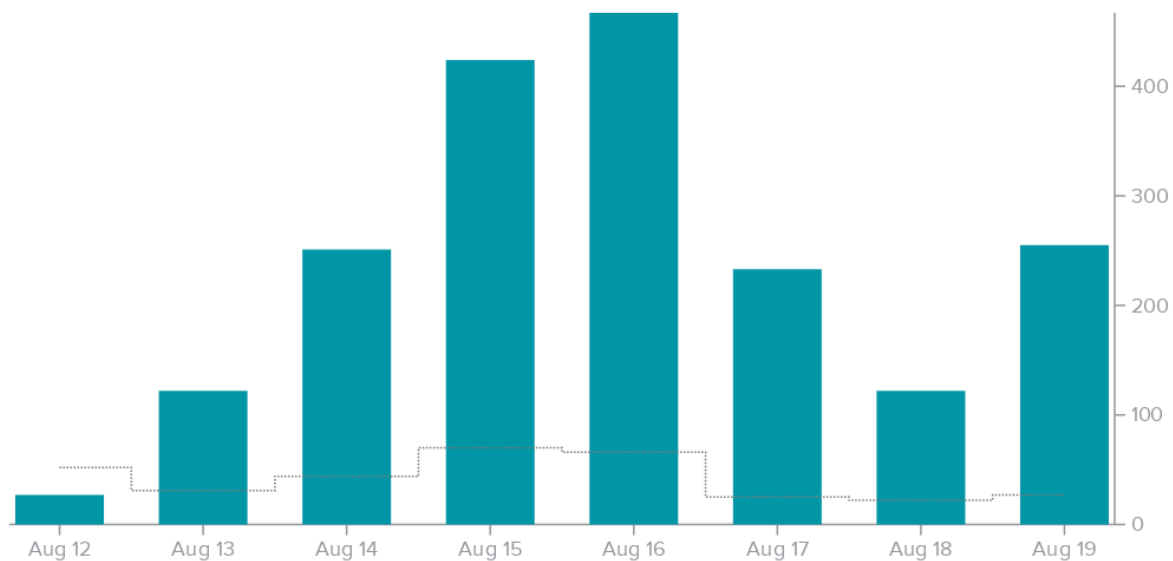
Social media interactions on articles per day



### Media Interest

**1.9k** Articles published **↑464%**

Number of articles published per day





- According to WHO, in 2024, 13 AFRO countries have reported a total of 3,575 cases and 25 deaths (CFR = 0.7%). Active transmission in 11 countries (Jul-Aug).
- In Burundi: Outbreak declared on 25 July 2024; 170 confirmed cases dispersed in 23 districts, no death | clade Ib. Case increased by 32% in week 32; no death
- Kenya: Outbreak declared on 29 July 2024, 1 case confirmed clade Ib, no death
- Rwanda: Outbreak declared on 24 July 2024.; 4 confirmed cases, clade Ib, no death
- Uganda: outbreak declared in early July, 3 confirmed cases, clade Ib, no death; third cases reported on 20 August 2024
- Liberia reported its 6th case on 20 August (more info needed)
- Mauritania reported its first case on 20 August (more info needed)
- DRC: 89% of all cases in the region, 16123 suspected cases, 559 potential mpox-related deaths. 1026 suspected cases and potential 27 related deaths in EW32.| 3235 confirmed cases. 19 confirmed deaths
- South Africa (24 cases|3 deaths), Côte d'Ivoire (7cases| 0 death), CAR (40 cases |0 death)

Name of Public health event: MPOX
Grade: 3

CASES: 5,952
| DEATHS: 47
| CFR: : 0.8%
| PHEOC STATUS: | Reporting Date: 21 August 2024

EPIDEMIOLOGY SITUATION UPDATE

- From Jan 2022 to 20 August 2024:
  - Cumulative suspected cases: 18,100 | Suspected deaths: 562 | CFR: 3.1%
  - Cumulative Confirmed cases: 5 952| Deaths: 47 | CFR: 0.8%
- In 2024, 13 AFRO countries have reported a total of 3,575 cases and 25 deaths (CFR = 0.7%). Active transmission in 11 countries (Jul-Aug).
- 494 new confirmed cases reported in the last 28 days (4 deaths) vs 708 cases in previous 28 days (3 deaths)
- In Burundi: Outbreak declared on 25 Jul 2024; 170 confirmed cases dispersed in 23 districts, no death | clade Ib. Case increased by 32% in week 32; no death
- Kenya: Outbreak declared on 29 July 2024, 1 case confirmed clade Ib, no death
- Rwanda: Outbreak declared on 24 July 2024.; 4 confirmed cases, clade Ib, no death
- Uganda: outbreak declared in early July, 3 confirmed cases, clade Ib, no death; third cases reported on 20 August 2024
- Liberia reported its 6<sup>th</sup> case on 20 August (more info needed)
- Mauritania reported its first case on 20 August (more info needed)
- DRC: 89% of all cases in the region, 16123 suspected cases, 559 potential mpox-related deaths. 1026 suspected cases and potential 27 related deaths in EW32.| 3235 confirmed cases. 19 confirmed deaths
- South Africa (24 cases|3 deaths), Cote d'Ivoire (7cases| 0 death), CAR (40 cases |0 death)

WHO African region epi curve confirmed cases (20 Aug 2024)

WHO African region, countries affected in 2024

Newly affected countries July / August 2024

- Burundi
- Rwanda
- Uganda
- Kenya
- Cote d'Ivoire\* (re-declared as active)
- Mauritania

\* Suspected cases are being investigated in other countries.

Emergency Operations Programme Area(EMRI), WHO Health Emergencies Programme in AFRO, Regional Office for Africa
Email: [afiro@afroshoc@who.int](mailto:afiro@afroshoc@who.int)

## What can we do?

- Collaborate with infodemic managers in the DRC and partners to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the infodemic situation, enhancing understanding and response strategies. That includes addressing a sentiment of tiredness regarding recurring outbreaks in the country such as the creation and dissemination of health messages that are culturally relevant and address local concerns. Using local languages, and consider traditional communication methods such as community gatherings and radio broadcasts can be beneficial.
- Tailor RCCE (Risk Communication and Community Engagement) efforts to address the specific needs and concerns of affected patients in each country (including children, men who have sex with men, etc).
- Leverage offline data from Burundian journalists and collaborative networks to gain additional insights and enhance the understanding of the infodemic landscape in Burundi.
- Upon announcement of vaccine supply, crisis communication specialists can support public health authorities to develop effective messaging especially in the current climate of heightened distrust toward WHO and health authorities.
- Ongoing monitoring of media coverage and online commentary is essential to determine whether infodemic trends persist or die after a couple of days. Conversations linking COVID-19 vaccines to Mpox should be closely monitored to assess whether they are gaining traction and spreading to mainstream media, private WhatsApp channels, social media pages, and communities.
- Collaborate with African fact-checkers to debunk harmful disinformation that links the start of the Mpox outbreak to COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

## Key resources

### Mpox

- [WHO](#), Strategic framework for enhancing prevention and control of mpox
- [WHO](#), Mpox in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- [VFA](#), Mpox social media kit
- [WHO](#), Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) for mpox outbreaks: Interim guidance, 24 June 2022
- [Africa CDC](#), Mpox situation in Africa

- [WHO](#), Public health taxonomy for social listening on monkeypox conversations
- [WHO](#), comprehensive list of Mpox webinar series
- [Internews](#), reporting on Mpox, a guide for journalists
- [WHO](#), multi-country outbreak of Mpox
- [SSHAP](#), Key Considerations: Risk Communication and Community Engagement for Mpox Vaccination in Eastern DRC
- [AFP Fact check](#), WHO mpox emergency declaration does not advise lockdowns
- [DW](#), Fact check: No link between mpox and COVID vaccination
- [DW](#), Fact check: Four fakes about monkeypox
- [WHO](#), LIVE: Q&A on #mpox. Join us and #AskWHO your questions!
- [WHO](#), the Global Mpox Dashboard

## 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 (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.

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.