

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

9-16 September 2024

Weekly brief #136

Top concern

[Misinformation that mpox is a side effect of COVID-19 vaccines is persistent while knowledge gaps about mpox and mpox vaccines are prevalent online.](#)

This week, mpox discussions reveal a noticeable gap between high media interest in reporting on mpox vaccine approval and lower engagement from online users with those articles. There is a notable increase in searches for mpox symptoms and treatments in the DRC according to google trends data.

At the same time, we note disinformation about the World Health Organization’s approval of the first mpox vaccine for adults in Africa.

Reference Guide

[Misinformation that mpox is a side effect of COVID-19 vaccines is persistent while knowledge gaps about mpox and mpox vaccines are prevalent online](#)

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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 9-16 September 2024 in Africa.

For more information, please contact:

Elsa Maria Karam karame@who.int, Rocío López Iñigo , llopez@who.int

Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa

Misinformation that mpox is a side effect of COVID-19 vaccines is persistent while knowledge gaps about mpox and mpox vaccines are prevalent online.

Breakdown per country

Democratic Republic of Congo

Engagement: 6 posts, 693 likes, 110 comments

Below are the main concerns from Congolese online users

[References: [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- Claims that mpox vaccines are part of profiteering schemes for western countries including the USA, and philanthropies including Bill Gates.
- Knowledge gap: who is eligible to receive the mpox vaccine?
- There is a notable increase in searches for mpox symptoms and treatments in the DRC according to google trends data. However, engagement regarding the mpox vaccine remains low online. The surge in searches indicates a continued high demand for information on mpox symptoms and treatments.

Kenya

Engagement: 10 posts, 1574 likes, 1059 comments

Below are the main concerns from Kenyan online users

[References [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- Questions whether eating bushmeat is practiced or not in Kenya
- Denial of claims that specific groups in Kenya consume monkeys
- Allegations that mpox management expenditure plans could benefit individuals and create opportunities for misuse and misappropriation of public funds (reference to “COVID-19 billionaires”).
- Claims that mpox vaccines are part of profiteering schemes, frequently discussed alongside COVID-19.

South Africa

Engagement: 7 posts, 356 likes, 143 comments

Below are the main concerns from South African online users

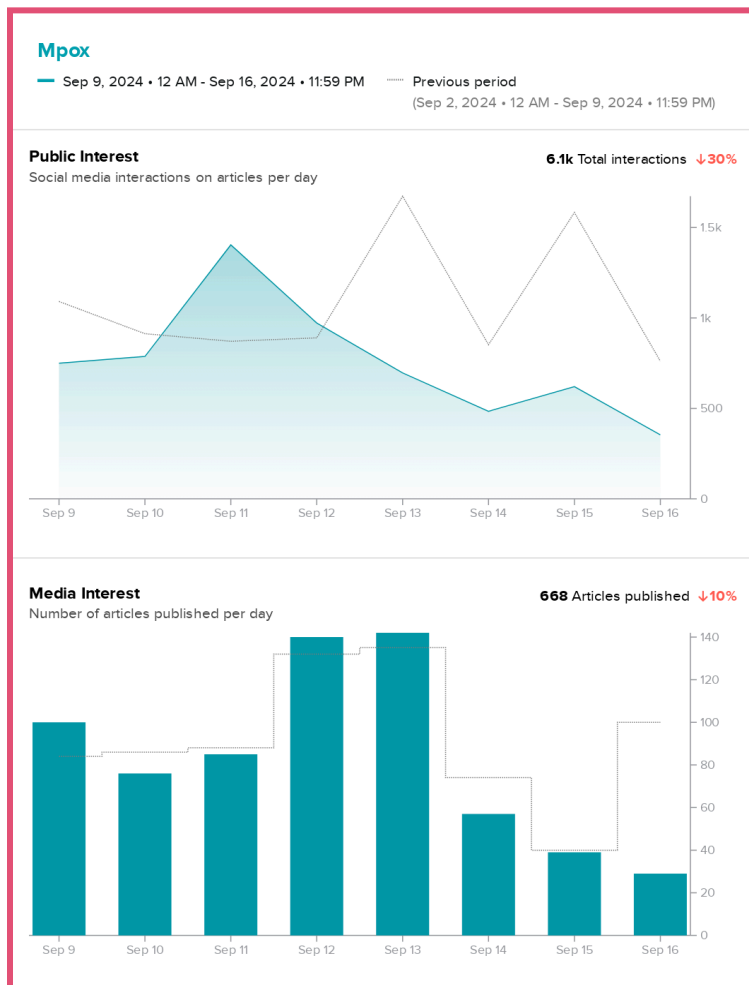
[References [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- Claims that mpox are shingles and it has resulted as a side effect caused by COVID-19

- Rejection of mpox vaccines due to negative sentiments stemming from trauma or mistrust associated with COVID vaccines.
- Speculations that a lockdown is imminent
- Statements from a South African medico-legal group warning the public about the risks of mpox vaccines include alleged serious adverse effects, with vaccines containing live viral strains which may instigate a resurgence of the eradicated smallpox virus.

Why is it concerning?

- Social media interactions on articles (websites, not social media) remained low despite a rise in the number of articles discussing the approval of mpox vaccines on 13 September. This does not mean that people are not talking about mpox, rather it provides some insights that more efforts on collecting offline data are needed to understand concerns. (Graph 1)



Graph 1. Public interest and media interest trends from 9 to 16 September in the African region. Source: NewsWhip

- During the monitored period, African online media outlets did not focus on the prequalification of the MVA-BN mpox vaccine—the first vaccine approved for mpox by WHO. Instead, other topics such as financial management of mpox and the consumption of bushmeat generated more interest. This lack of coverage is concerning as it may reflect missed opportunities to inform the public about critical advancements in mpox prevention. Public awareness of vaccine availability and WHO prequalification can be vital in building trust, encouraging uptake, and preventing future outbreaks, especially among vulnerable populations.
- Over the past three weeks, discussions about mpox have frequently included recurring claims that link rejection of the mpox vaccine to the rejection of the COVID-19 vaccine. It's important to consider this because this link with traumatic experiences in the past during the COVID-19 pandemic or confusion about the new vaccines released then could reinforce broader anti-vaccine sentiment. This may impact vaccine uptake, not only for mpox but for other routine immunization vaccines too .
- Online disinformation about the World Health Organization's approval of the first mpox vaccine for adults in Africa started emanating from global accounts known for anti-vaccine narratives stating that there have been no clinical trials of mpox vaccines [\[LINK\]](#). However, according to WHO [\[LINK\]](#), *“good safety profile and vaccine performance has been consistently demonstrated in clinical studies, as well as in real-world use during the ongoing global outbreak since 2022”*. Disinformation from global accounts known for anti-vaccine narratives can quickly spread, and may seed mistrust on mpox vaccines among African populations, also promoting further mistrust on WHO and other public health agencies.

What can we do?

- **Work through trusted channels to address vaccine disinformation campaigns:** International sources/networks known for spreading anti-vaccine disinformation are currently circulating false claims about mpox vaccines. With the scheduled vaccination campaign in the DRC approaching in mid-October, it is important to collaborate with local fact-checkers and media to ensure accurate information on vaccine safety is widely accessible and coming from trusted voices within communities.

- **Provide information about mpox in different formats and languages to respond to the knowledge gap:** Explainer videos featuring African technical experts and in local languages specific to affected areas can provide communities with essential information about mpox symptoms, treatments, and vaccine safety. Social media cards or simple infographics can also be used to share key guidance in relevant languages through WhatsApp groups, one of the main channels for spreading misinformation.
- **Collaborate with infodemic managers and media partners (journalists):** Triangulate data from different sources to understand the impact of infodemic trends in different countries affected by mpox. Leveraging offline data from Burundian and Congolese journalists, and other collaborative networks can provide a better understanding of the impact of misinformation on people's attitudes in affected areas.
- **Ongoing monitoring** about the spillover of anti-vaccine narratives, especially among prominent regional disinformation activists, is needed to respond to rising concerns about mpox vaccines. Directly targeting these actors is not recommended but monitoring the impact of their messages can help us identify the most vulnerable online communities and work through other trusted influencers to provide accurate information.

Key resources

Mpox

Resources for social listening analysts

- [WHO](#), Public health taxonomy for social listening on monkeypox conversations

Resources for journalists & fact checking

- [Internews](#), reporting on Mpox, a guide for journalists
- [WHO](#), comprehensive list of Mpox webinar series
- [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

Resources/Content for social media

- [VFA](#), Mpox social media kit
- [WHO](#), LIVE: Q&A on #mpox. Join us and #AskWHO your questions!
- [WHO](#), Episode #124 - Mpox: what you need to know

Technical update

- [WHO](#), Strategic framework for enhancing prevention and control of mpox
- [WHO](#), Mpox in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- [Africa CDC](#), Mpox situation in Africa
- [WHO](#), multi-country outbreak of Mpox

Public health guidance/RCCE

- [WHO](#), Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) for mpox
- [WHO](#), the Global Mpox Dashboard
- [SSHAP](#), Key Considerations: Risk Communication and Community Engagement for Mpox Vaccination in Eastern DRC
- [WHO](#), Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) for monkeypox outbreaks: interim guidance, 24 June 2022.
- [WHO](#), Public health advice for sex workers on mpox

Methodology

The social media listening process relies on a combination of social media analyses conducted for French, English and Lusophone-speaking countries.

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, Google Trends.

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 or groups (e.g. private Facebook groups).

We also rely on infodemic managers based in Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya to provide insights into relevant national infodemic trends or offline content, as well as country-level reports. As we produce more content, we seek to triangulate and corroborate information across these groups to strengthen our infodemic response.