

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

7 October - 14 October 2024

Weekly brief #140

Top concerns

Suspicion following the report of Marburg virus (MVD) cases and the start of MVD vaccination for the most at-risk populations in Rwanda.

Rwandan internet users have expressed their suspicion following reports of Marburg virus (MVD) cases and the start of MVD vaccination for the most at-risk populations

Concerns about the polio vaccine administered to children by the Ministry of Health and potential side effects in Kenya.

Some Kenyans, supported by a few influencers, have expressed concerns about the type of vaccine being administered and some potential side effects.

Growing scepticism and distrust towards governments, along with an increase in stigmatisation, in response to the ongoing mpox outbreak.

Congolese people are reacting to a video showing inhumane detention conditions, while Zambians express concerns over the first detected case of mpox in Zambia.

Reference Guide

[Suspicion following the report of Marburg virus \(MVD\) cases and the start of MVD vaccination for the most at-risk populations in Rwanda.](#).....Pg. 4

[Concerns about the polio vaccine administered to children by the Ministry of Health and its potential side effects in Kenya.](#).....Pg. 8

[Growing skepticism and distrust towards governments, along with an increase in stigmatisation, in response to the ongoing mpox outbreak.](#)..... Pg. 10

[Key resources](#).....Pg. 12

[Methodology](#).....Pg. 14

Public Health Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This weekly report provides key highlights and operational recommendations based on social listening data from January 29-February 5 in Africa.

For more information, please contact the WHO AIRA team: Yara El Moussaoui ely@who.int; Rocío López Iñigo, llopez@who.int

Rwanda/Kenya

Suspicion following the report of Marburg virus (MVD) cases and the start of MVD vaccination for the most at-risk populations in Rwanda.

Engagement: 23 posts, 6680 likes, 1072 comments.

Here are the main concerns expressed by Rwandan online users, according to a general taxonomy of social listening:

Marburg Outbreak Management: Scepticism Regarding U.S. Support for Rwanda During the Current Outbreak

The emergence of Marburg virus disease (MVD) in Rwanda has sparked scepticism among internet users about the support that will be provided by the U.S. to assist in the emergency response. [LINK](#).

Examples below:

1. “Rwandans have been sold along with their children... you will be used to test vaccines until you die 😂😂😂”. [LINK](#)
2. “We cannot accept this money; they have crossed the line.” [LINK](#)

Vaccine Conspiracy Theories and Concerns Over an Influencer’s Vaccination :

Mistrust of health authorities has been further fueled by conspiracy theories circulating in conversations about the vaccine and the origins of the disease. This distrust was also evident during the vaccination of singer and doctor Tom Close, who was vaccinated as a frontline worker, with many commentators expressing scepticism about the vaccine. The main conspiracy theories include claims that the government is manipulating the Marburg situation to harm Rwandans through vaccines, while also blaming specific groups for spreading the outbreak.

Examples below:

1. “These are the COVID-19 games of leaders who were taking selfies and doing all this for their own profit!”. [LINK](#)

2. “Do you really see what our government has done to help Rwandans live healthily, while you understand they have plans to kill them with vaccines?”. [LINK.](#)
3. “Let’s see a video of you getting vaccinated and showing those teeth, man, you’re all white puppets we know.” [LINK.](#)

Kenyans Express Concern About the Spread of Marburg Virus from Rwanda.

Some Kenyan internet users have expressed alarming concerns about the transmission of the Marburg virus from Rwanda. They fear this will endanger the Kenyan population and are calling for border closures. This sentiment reflects widespread anxiety over health security and frustration with the authorities. The growing mistrust of public health measures creates fertile ground for misinformation, necessitating proactive and transparent communication.

Examples below:

1. “Can we close the borders, because right now if this comes here, Kenyans will be doomed!” [LINK.](#)
2. “Please take care of the issues in your country, like people dying without access to healthcare due to petty policies on insurance schemes.” [LINK](#)

Visual analysis

Harya mwamenyera niba Kagame wanyu yaratanze condolences ku miryango y’abaganga bishwe na Virus ya Marburg!?

uyu mugabo asuzugura ubuzima bwacu 😊



3:00 PM · 13/10/2024 · 14K Views

.Virus ya Marburg yakomotse Germany
 .BioNTech ikomoka Germany
 .18 Dec 2023: BioNTech yatashye uruganda rwayo Kigali
 .in Less than a year: Kigali itewe n’icyorezo cya Marburg
 .in less than 3 weeks icyorezo gitangiye Urukungo ruhise ruboneka

Are you thinking what I’m thinking 😊



2:13 PM · 07/10/2024 · 20K Views

36 14 56 13

1- Screenshot of a Retweet on X: [\[LINK\]](#)

The question raised here expresses frustration and doubt regarding whether President Kagame offered condolences to the families of doctors who died from the Marburg virus. The comment also highlights a sense of discontent, accusing the president of not valuing the lives of citizens:

"How would you know if your Kagame has offered condolences to the families of the doctors who died from the Marburg virus!? This man despises our lives."

2- Tweet Circulating on X and Screenshots on Facebook: [\[LINK\]](#)

The tweet mentions a conspiracy theory linking the origin of the Marburg virus to BioNTech (a German company) and the current outbreak in Rwanda. It points out that BioNTech opened a factory in Kigali in December 2023, followed by a Marburg outbreak less than a year later, with a vaccine available in three weeks. This coincidence fuels speculation and mistrust.

Why is this concerning?

- The skepticism regarding U.S. support for Rwanda during the Marburg outbreak raises concerns about the transparency and effectiveness of international aid. Users are questioning the motivations behind this assistance, fearing it may not genuinely aim to protect the population. Provocative statements, such as insinuating that Rwandans are “sold” and used for vaccine testing, exacerbate the climate of mistrust. This sentiment could hinder community cooperation and compromise public health efforts.
- Mistrust towards health authorities, fueled by conspiracy theories about vaccines, threatens to erode public confidence in public health interventions. The vaccination of influencers, such as Tom Close, which drew criticism, reflects growing anxiety within the population. These concerns are exacerbated by accusations that the government is manipulating the COVID-19 situation to harm Rwandans. This mistrust could lead to vaccine refusal, weakening the health response to outbreaks.
- The increasing concerns of Kenyans regarding the transmission of the Marburg virus from Rwanda highlight a widespread anxiety over regional health security.

The call for border closures demonstrates intense fear that could have economic and social repercussions. This situation reflects a lack of trust in health authorities, leading to frustration with public health management, which can foster misinformation. Therefore, proactive and transparent communication is crucial to alleviate fears and restore trust.

What can we do?

Promote Transparency and Engagement in the Fight Against MVD

Organize informational sessions where experts from the WHO and the Ministry of Health explain the safety protocols in place. By highlighting the testimonies of MVD survivors and the experiences of healthcare professionals in the field, we can reduce conspiracy theories and strengthen public trust in health authorities.

Continuously Monitor Public Perceptions and Concerns

Establish regular mechanisms to assess public perceptions and concerns regarding vaccines and the management of the Marburg outbreak. This could include online surveys, focus groups, and social media analyses to better understand citizens' concerns and tailor responses accordingly.

Enhance Communication About the MVD Outbreak Between Rwanda and Kenya

Develop a clear and proactive communication strategy, including regular updates on the MVD outbreak in Rwanda and its relation to Kenya. Create a schedule for regular dialogues with the media to share accurate information and address public concerns. Engaging the public through various media channels can help dispel misinformation and foster a climate of trust.

Engage Community Leaders and Influencers

Collaborate with respected figures in the community and influencers to promote positive messages about vaccination and public health. Their involvement can help reach broader audiences and generate collective support for recommended health measures.

Address Rumors and Misinformation

Create a rapid response center to address rumors and misinformation regarding vaccines and public health management. This could include developing FAQs, explanatory videos, and updating information on social media platforms to counter myths and reassure the public.

Kenya

Concerns about the polio vaccine administered to children by the Ministry of Health and its potential side effects in Kenya.

Engagement: **16 posts, 17329 likes, 869 comments**

Main Concerns of Kenyan Internet Users:

Concerns About the Side Effects of the Polio Vaccine Administered to Children

The Kenyan Ministry of Health has launched a national polio vaccination campaign. However, some Kenyans have expressed concerns regarding the type of vaccine being administered and its side effects [LINK](#). Reports suggest that vaccinated children have fallen ill shortly after receiving the vaccine, and vaccination agents are allegedly concealing the identity of the vehicles used during their rounds in neighborhoods. [LINK](#). Examples include:

1. “Why are these people moving in masked vehicles? They hide the license plates... be transparent about the expiration date of this vaccine.” [LINK](#).
2. “Books demystify the deceptions behind polio vaccination, the lies, and the origins of all these charades. Important information is hidden from the public, and if revealed, it is labeled as ‘pseudo-science’ or ‘conspiracy theory.’ Don’t be sheep. Use your brain.” [LINK](#).
3. “Please do not allow your children to receive this polio vaccine. Ugandans refused it after serious hidden discoveries.” [LINK](#).

Actions Taken by the Ministry of Health:

The Ministry has initiated an investigation into unverified reports regarding the side effects of the polio vaccine after some Kenyans raised concerns about the type of vaccine administered and its side effects [LINK](#). It also issued an official statement urging the public to refrain from spreading rumors about vaccines [LINK](#) [LINK](#). Despite these efforts, misinformation continues to spread, complicating the Ministry's task of maintaining public trust in vaccination initiatives.

Examples include:

1. “It’s Bill Gates; these are not rumors.” [LINK](#).
2. “Since the coronavirus dose, trust is an issue here...” [LINK](#).
3. “It’s true; the polio vaccine has many side effects: cough, high fever, and diarrhea. My child is a victim. 😞” [LINK](#).

Why is This Concerning?

- The concerns expressed by Kenyan internet users regarding the side effects of the polio vaccine raise major issues about public trust in vaccination campaigns. Allegations that vaccinated children fell ill shortly after vaccination, coupled with mistrust towards vaccination agents using masked vehicles, fuel skepticism towards health authorities.
- This situation can lead to a lack of confidence in the Ministry of Health, compromising the effectiveness of vaccination initiatives. Fears of misinformation and accusations of manipulations behind vaccination, such as those referencing Bill Gates, reinforce a climate of distrust that risks hindering child vaccination efforts.
- Despite the Ministry's efforts to investigate these allegations and communicate proactively with the public, the persistence of rumors and unverified concerns could severely hinder the fight against polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

What Can We Do?

- Establish Ongoing Dialogue with the Community:**
Organize regular community meetings specifically focused on polio vaccination. These gatherings will allow parents and caregivers to ask questions about potential side effects of the vaccine, receive answers from health agents, and share their experiences. This will strengthen transparency and trust between the community and health authorities.
- Engage Local Opinion Leaders:**
Collaborate with respected figures in the community, such as teachers, religious leaders, and pediatricians, to share verified information about the polio vaccine. Their voices can play a key role in reducing anxiety and mistrust towards the vaccine, providing testimonials about its effectiveness and safety.
- Enhance Transparency in the Vaccination Process:**
Regularly publish detailed information about the polio vaccine, including data on its effectiveness, possible side effects, and safety protocols in place. Newsletters

or explanatory videos accessible on community platforms can help clarify doubts and counter rumors.

Organize Social Media Awareness Campaigns:

Launch campaigns on social media that highlight stories from parents who have vaccinated their children against polio, accompanied by testimonials from health experts. Use infographics and videos to explain the vaccine's safety and the benefits of vaccination, reassuring parents and encouraging participation in the vaccination campaign.

Create a Listening and Response Unit for Public Concerns:

Establish a hotline or an online platform dedicated to allowing citizens to ask questions about the polio vaccination. This unit should be responsible for providing clear, data-driven responses, addressing parents' concerns, and alleviating fears surrounding vaccination.

Implement Media Monitoring:

Create a team within the Ministry of Health to actively monitor social media and community forums for vaccination-related rumors. This team should be equipped to respond quickly with accurate, factual information to dispel unfounded fears and promote a positive narrative around vaccination.

République Démocratique du Congo, Zambia

Increase in scepticism and distrust towards governments, accompanied by an intensification of stigma, in the face of the ongoing mpox epidemic.

Engagement: 22 posts, 7865 likes, 2601 comments.

The main concerns of Congolese internet users include the following:

Congolese React to a Video Showing Inhumane Detention Conditions

A widely shared video on social media recently alleged that patients suffering from mpox live in difficult detention conditions, including the lack of toilets and adequate medical care. These testimonies also denounce the forced cohabitation of women and men in inappropriate facilities. The dissemination of this video has exacerbated distrust towards the Congolese health system. [\[LINK\]](#)

This video fuels distrust towards the health services provided by the government and raises questions about the management of funds allocated to these services. At the same time, this situation reinforces vaccine hesitancy already marked by doubts about the efficacy and safety of vaccines, particularly regarding the mpox vaccination campaigns. Examples include:

1. “If this is really the case, where are all these millions of dollars that have been allocated to fight mpox going? Should we understand that this money is already being misappropriated? Frankly, this country leaves one speechless.” [\[LINK\]](#)
2. “What kind of country doesn’t take anything seriously while millions of money are disbursed for the proper care of these patients? It’s astonishing that everything ends up in individuals’ pockets. Why is such disorder tolerated by the hierarchy?” [\[LINK\]](#)

Main Concerns of Zambian Internet Users:

Concerns of Zambians Regarding the First Case of mpox Detected in Zambia

Zambia reported its first case of mpox last week involving a Tanzanian citizen. [\[LINK\]](#) This situation has sparked mixed reactions among the population. Some Zambians have expressed concern over the increasing number of foreigners in the country, demanding the immediate repatriation of the patient to Tanzania. [\[LINK\]](#)

Online comments reflect a rising concern, with some stating, “We already have enough health problems” and calling for the expulsion of foreigners to prevent further spread of diseases. This misconception may reinforce distrust towards the health system, fuel anti-immigrant sentiments, and complicate the management of the epidemic by health authorities. Examples include:

1. “Too many foreigners in our country, Zambia, please send him back.” [\[LINK\]](#)
2. “We don’t want diseases; we already have so many problems. Too many foreigners in Zambia, send him back immediately.” [\[LINK\]](#)
3. “Can you send him back to Tanzania immediately?” [\[LINK\]](#)

Why Is This Concerning?

- The difficult detention conditions recently highlighted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo following a purportedly shared video on social media raise serious concerns about public trust in the health system. Questions

regarding the use of funds allocated to combat mpox enhance a climate of distrust that risks undermining the acceptance of vaccination campaigns.

- In Zambia, the detection of the first case of mpox has also elicited mixed reactions, with some calling for the immediate repatriation of foreign patients. This perception, coupled with anti-immigrant sentiments, complicates the management of the epidemic and raises concerns about the spread of diseases. Rumors and stigma could thus compromise the effectiveness of public health initiatives, making transparent dialogue essential to restore trust and ensure an adequate response to health challenges.

What Can We Do?

- Strengthen Transparency in Health Fund Management:** Establish transparency mechanisms regarding the allocation and use of funds designated for health services, including those allocated to combat mpox. Publish regular public reports detailing expenditures and outcomes of health programs to restore trust and alleviate concerns related to fund misappropriation.
- Improve Access to Information and Medical Assistance:** Establish clear and accessible information channels regarding patient rights, including detention conditions and access to medical care. Implement information campaigns in communities to educate citizens about their rights and the health services available.
- Combat Stigma Associated with Infectious Diseases:** Develop targeted campaigns to combat stigma related to individuals infected with mpox or other diseases. Utilize survivor testimonies and positive messages about rehabilitation to raise public awareness and foster empathy. Engage opinion leaders and influencers to change the narrative around infectious diseases and encourage respectful and inclusive treatment of affected individuals.

Key resources

MVD

Resources/Content for social media

- [WHO](#), Marburg fact sheet
- [WHO](#), Marburg virus disease Q&A
- [VFA](#), MVD social media toolkit

Polio

Resources/Content for social media

- [WHO](#), Polio fact sheet
- [VFA](#), Polio social media toolkit

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.

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.