

PEER TO PEER

FACTSHEET

A BI-WEEKLY RUMOR TRACKING UPDATE FOR JOURNALISTS



Theme: Hoax

Risk Ranking: Medium Risk

This rumor is ranked as a medium risk as it has the likelihood of raising doubts about the threat of COVID-19, thereby contributing to vaccine hesitancy and disregard of COVID-19 prevention protocols such as wearing of masks, sanitizing and social distancing which may expose individuals and communities to the risk of infection and spread of the virus.

Rumor assessment

HIGH RISK: These are rumors that are likely to be believed and cause significant and immediate danger or harm to an individual, group, or the wider community.

MEDIUM RISK: Content that is very likely to be believed and cause widespread action and panic. Medium risk rumors are also those that have the potential to have a larger impact on the community and have more traction.

LOW RISK: This is rumor content that if they are believed, they will NOT pose an immediate and severe danger to an individual or the community.

FACTS

- According to statistics released by the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) the number of COVID-19 active cases stands at 2, 643.
- On February 17, 2022, Reuters noted the daily average of new COVID-19 infections as 190, a significant decline from 382 new cases recorded on January 17, 2022.
- Omicron, the latest COVID-19 variant whose presence was confirmed in Zimbabwe in December 2021, is still to be fully understood by scientists who have reported over 60 mutations of the variants' genome.
- The country's COVID-19 coordinator, Dr Agnes Mahomva has warned the public against complacency saying the Omicron variant had led to an increase in deaths.

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There is clear evidence that people with underlying conditions, people with advanced age, people who are unvaccinated can have a severe form of COVID-19 following infection from Omicron. It is known that people are still being hospitalized [with Omicron] as well as dying, so it's important we have information out there that is accurate, that does suggest it is less severe than Delta, but it is not mild.

Dr. Mahomva

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CONTEXT

Zimbabwe has reported a decline in COVID-19 infections and active cases since the beginning of the year with a 14 day average of 127 new infections per day as at February 9, 2022.

In response, on January 28, 2022, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) relaxed Level two lockdown restrictions by extending curfew hours from between 2200hrs and 0530hrs to midnight and 0400hrs. Schools which were supposed to reopen on January 10, were allowed to reopen on February 7, while operating hours for businesses have been extended to 0700hrs to 2200 hrs.

Meanwhile media attention around COVID-19 has been sporadic, with occasional attention when there is breaking news about new variants or a spike in infection rates. This limited attention has given the impression that COVID-19 is becoming a thing of the past.

ABOUT ROOTED IN TRUST

Rooted in Trust 2.0 is a global pandemic information response program funded by the Bureau for Humanitarian assistance (BHA/USAID) and implemented by Internews countering the unprecedented scale and speed of the spread of rumors and misinformation. COVID-19 has created chaos and confusion around the world and put vulnerable communities in more danger. Providing accurate and relevant information about COVID-19 prevention, vaccines and new strains is imperative to protect lives of communities around the world that are already suffering from marginalisation, displacements, and insecurity. In Zimbabwe Rooted in Trust 2.0 is working with media, health, and humanitarian actors in ensuring that information disseminated is responsive to needs of communities in Southern Zimbabwe provinces of Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South, Midlands, Masvingo and Bulawayo. Focus is on marginalised communities and vulnerable groups within these communities, especially women and youth who are usually excluded in mainstream media.

TIPS FOR THE MEDIA

**CHECK
IT OUT!**

Harness and maximize investigative journalism

Journalists should invest time and effort in understanding different facets of COVID-19 in order to have an in-depth approach to sharing information on COVID-19. In-depth, analytical and science-based reports will go a long way in addressing misinformation and rumors that question the existence of COVID-19. Backing up such reports with comments from (respected) expert sources within the science community locally and internationally will also help media audiences identify with what is being reported in the media.

Highlight the continued existence of COVID-19 and the threat it poses:

Journalists should continue to provide communities with up-to-date statistics of COVID-19 as well as emerging facts. This will ensure communities have accurate information to use in positioning themselves to staying safe especially in a context where there is still uncertainty around the behavior of the COVID-19 virus and its variants.

Provide balanced and accurate coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic

Journalists should continue to provide deep, accurate and balanced coverage giving context to COVID-19 statistics. In the wake of COVID-19 fatigue amongst media audiences, the use of human interest stories to draw attention to COVID-19 issues will help dispel misconceptions around the increase and/or decrease in infections, hospitalizations and deaths.

