

Lugara Media Factsheet



Rooted in Trust

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This Media Factsheet is a periodic response to rumors and concerns about COVID-19 and provides verified information for journalists and community correspondents reporting on the pandemic. It is meant to provide information that is essential to understand the facts about the virus, vaccines & related issues, to help journalists respond to their audiences' questions, address rumors, and close the feedback loop.

This Media Factsheet has been reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Health

The Internews Rooted in Trust 2.0 project in South Sudan, is funded by USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID-BHA). It aims to respond to rumors, misinformation, and fake news that shape negative public perceptions towards COVID-19 response in the country.

WHAT WE HEARD:

"Is Omicron just the nickname for the normal December flu?"
- WhatsApp Group South Sudan

"People are saying there's no point in getting vaccinated since those who took vaccines are testing positive for Covid-19."
Face-to-face conversations at Juba University, South Sudan.

FACT CHECK:

Misinformation aimed at downplaying the severity of the coronavirus has spread online since the early days of the pandemic. One of the most common falsehoods is the claim that COVID-19 is just another strain of the seasonal flu. A rumor dismissing COVID-19 as a hoax and Omicron as a mere **"December flu"** emerged in South Sudan on a WhatsApp group in December 2021; this rumor is false and has been debunked by the World Health Organization. On January 11, 2022, WHO warned against treating COVID-19 as an endemic illness like the flu; COVID-19 is a pandemic (<http://globalnews.ca/tag/who>).

These statements and claims can undermine public confidence in COVID-19 response efforts, contribute to low adherence in observing preventive measures and to low uptake of vaccines. It is important for journalists to know the difference between COVID-19 and influenza and inform citizens to better protect themselves. COVID-19 and influenza (flu) are both infectious respiratory diseases, and they share some symptoms, but COVID-19 is much more deadly. However, they are caused by different viruses, and there are some differences in who is most vulnerable to severe disease. There are also differences in how the diseases are treated.

The South Sudan COVID-19 National Task Force directed higher learning institutions to ban unvaccinated students and staff from campuses. Misinformation and rumors aimed at downplaying the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines emerged among students at Juba University, who claimed that even the vaccinated are contracting the COVID-19 virus. According to WHO's Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, "first and foremost, we know that vaccination is incredibly protective against severe disease and death, but it also does prevent some infections and some onward transmission. But it's not perfect in terms of preventing infections and transmission. This is why we also recommend making sure people protect themselves against exposure".

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/media-resources/science-in-5/episode-64---why-are-experts-concerned-about-omicron>
Therefore, it is important for journalists to remind everyone of the benefits of vaccines and even if one gets ill after being vaccinated, symptoms are more likely to be mild.

TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS

In addressing the above rumors, journalists need to prepare themselves to understand the basic facts and disseminate information. Journalists can talk to relevant officials and interview trusted health experts to produce programs that resonate with the local audiences. They can also interview citizens to understand the public perceptions and close the feedback loop.

For further information, refer to the following links: "COVID-19: an informative guide & advice for journalists, January 2021."
<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/339256/WHO-EURO-2021-936-41687-57038-eng.pdf>

<https://healthjournalism.internews.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/02/GOOD-TO-KNOW-Reporting-on-the-Omicron-variant.pdf>

KEY LINKS AND RESOURCES

Interesting free courses on health journalism such as **"Let's Talk Vaccines"**.
<https://earthjournalism.net/lets-talk-vaccines-an-internews-online-course>

Free Webinar for journalists on How to improve COVID-19 coverage:
<https://journalismcourses.org/news/how-to-improve-covid-19-coverage-webinar-for-journalists-offered-by-unesco-who-and-knight-center-register-for-free-now/>

The Rooted in Trust 2.0 project works to combat COVID-19 rumors and misinformation, responds to the information challenges faced by vulnerable groups, encourages open dialogue between citizens and stronger collaborative partnerships between information providers.

USAID-BHA Rooted in Trust 2.0 South Sudan

If you want to contribute to or provide feedback on this

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