



# The Humanitarian Bulletin

Zimbabwe  
JULY , 2022

## About Rooted in Trust

Rooted in Trust 2.0 is a global pandemic information response program funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID-BHA) and implemented by Internews to counter the unprecedented scale and speed of the spread of rumors and misinformation on COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines.

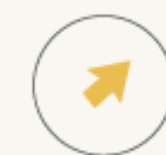
Rooted in Trust 2.0 in Zimbabwe is working with media, community-based organizations and health and humanitarian actors to build a healthier information ecosystem that is responsive to the needs of migrant communities in Southern Zimbabwe, particularly in the provinces of Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South, Midlands, Masvingo and Bulawayo. Our work focuses on vulnerable groups within these communities, especially on women and youth.

## Rumor data overview



Rumors in this bulletin were collected by Internews in Zimbabwe, for the period **July 01, 2022, to July 31, 2022.**

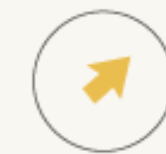
Overall, Internews identified a total of **266 rumors** from various posts and comments on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and through in person social listening groups with communities. Rumor selection criteria is based on a risk assessment matrix that accounts for the frequency of discussion or social media engagements and its potential impact in the community.



Senziwani Ndlovu  
**Project Manager**



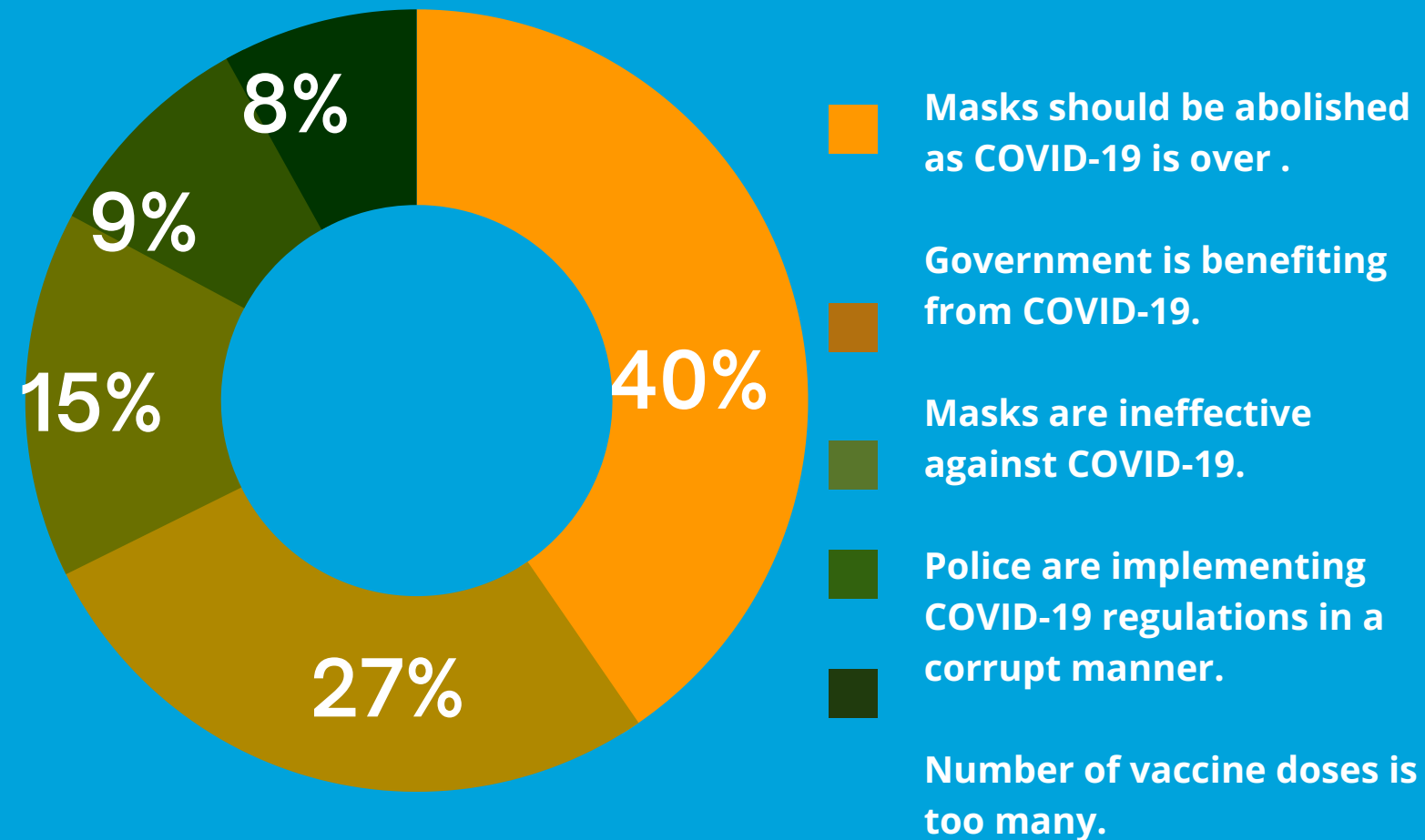
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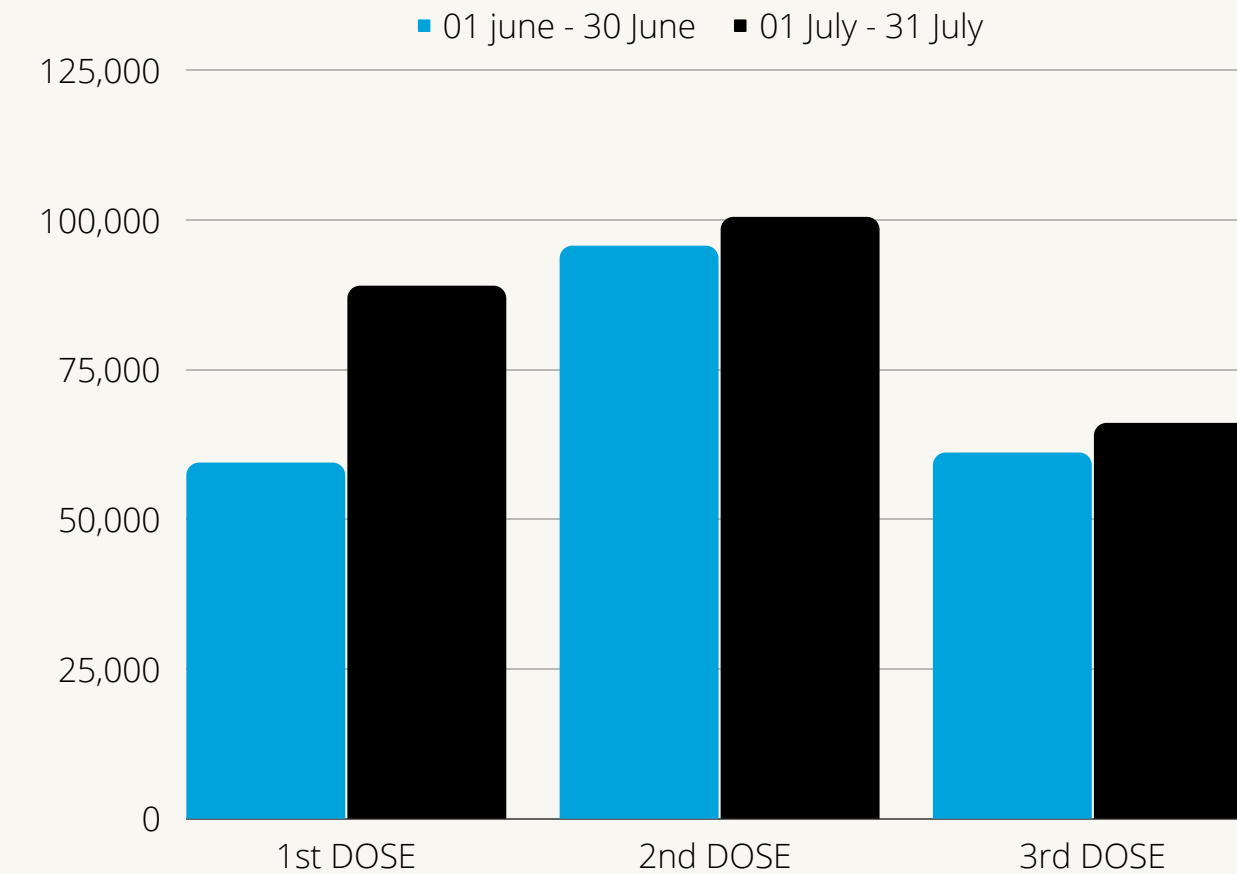
## Trending rumor themes



Visualization by RiT: Data analyzed from (MoHCC) Statistics

Internews in Zimbabwe collected 266 rumors during the period ending July 31 from July 01, 2022, with 25% rumors from Facebook, 47% from Twitter and 28% from community platforms using in person listening groups. Trending rumors included that, "Masks should be abolished as COVID-19 is over (40%)", "Government is benefiting from COVID-19 (27%)", "Masks are ineffective against COVID-19 (15%)", "Police are implementing COVID-19 regulations in a corrupt manner (9%)", and vaccine doses administered are too many (8%). Internews Zimbabwe and partners also collected 4 rumors linking Monkeypox to COVID-19 during the reporting period.

## Rumor data overview



Visualization by RiT :Data from RiT Humanitarian Dashboard

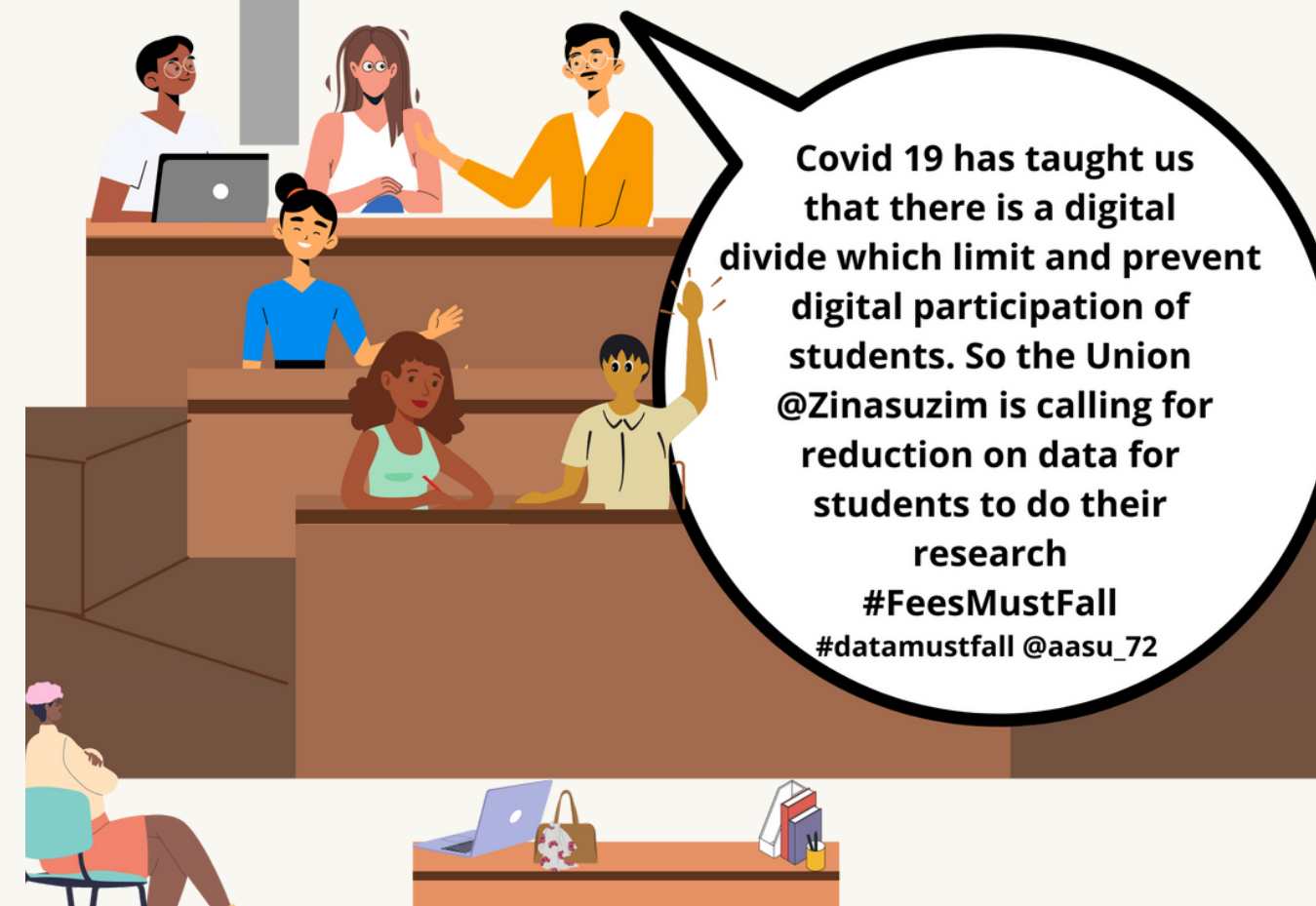
Zimbabwe recorded an increase of 50% in 1st vaccine doses administered in period ending July 31, 2022. 2nd vaccine dose uptake increased by 5% to 100, 459 from 95, 652 recorded last month and the 3rd vaccine dose increased by 10% from 61, 094 recorded in June to 67, 085 in July.

COVID-19 regulations have been relaxed and life seems back to normal for many. Active cases dropped from 1, 332 in June to 463 in July. 43 people were admitted to hospital for COVID-19 in July compared to 155 last month. As of July 31, 2022, there were 17 hospitalized cases with 9 out of 11 cases vaccinated while 6 were unvaccinated. COVID-19 related deaths decrease in July to 20 from 51 in June 2022.



# WHY DOES IT MATTER

The concern is important as it shows the disparities between the rich and the poor, urban versus rural schools in terms of digital participation in the era of COVID-19. It reflects how the pandemic changed learning for schools and tertiary institutions from classroom based to electronic learning. This negatively impacted students who could not afford data, and gadgets such as computers and smart phones. Online learning has come with high costs for the poor in Zimbabwe especially due to the increase of data cost by telecommunications providers such as Econet and Netone.



## What's behind the concern?

The concern is being triggered, by the continuous hiking of data tariffs by leading mobile operators such as Econet and Netone. Mobile networks supported by Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) have indicated that for them to survive in the hyper inflationary environment, there is need for the continuous increase in tariffs.

The concern reflects the impact of COVID-19 on the education system of the country and the widening digital-divide. When COVID-19 hit, schools were forced to close and private schools as well as tertiary institutions migrated studies to online platforms. Most students could, however, not access these platforms due to lack of enabling resources such as data and smart gadgets to access online resources. There was no support from government to students with data or the gadgets for online studies.

## Why does it matter?

**Zimbabwe's largest mobile operator** network, Econet has been hiking the prices of mobile data bundles by between 30% and 225% and Netone has been doing the same. The Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (Potraz) indicated that price increases help mobile networks to keep pace with rising costs of doing business in a highly inflationary environment. Econet, as the biggest mobile network operator has indicated the need to continuously increase tariffs, as the only way to keep the telecoms industry viable as the sector is resource- intensive and relies heavily on foreign currency which is in short supply.

**Government's decision to introduce** full-fledged electronic learning (e-learning) in colleges and universities following the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures starting in 2020 threw the higher education system into disarray as a sizable number of students were left out due to high data tariffs and lack of internet connectivity.

**The Zimbabwe School Examination** Council (ZIMSEC) marked a 6.8% pass rate drop in the 2020 O'level results owing to challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. 88 primary schools recorded a zero percent pass rate in 2021 and most of them are rural schools. 51 schools in Matabeleland North recorded zero percent pass rate in the 2021 grade 7 exams. Rural schools suffered more as they do not have access to gadgets and data that is required to access online learning.

# Recommendations

- **Humanitarian actors working with communities** can engage with the Ministry of Education and Culture, and partner with local community radio stations to deliver educational sessions for different subjects so that children and youths with no access to the internet are not left behind in the learning process.
- **Partners working with the education sector can lobby** for organizations that work with the Ministry of Education and Culture, such as the Higherlife Foundation to target marginalized communities especially in remote areas through assisting them with computers and internet services.
- **Partners working with children and youth** from schools and tertiary institutions, can facilitate setting up of school and tertiary student representative structures, that continuously work on lobbying internet providers such as Econet, Netone, ZOL and Telone to create data packages specifically targeted for schools and tertiary institutions that are affordable.





## WHY DOES IT MATTER

The rumour emanated from Masvingo community and is important as it promotes the uptake of alcohol by everyone (including children) as a COVID-19 prevention measure. It has the implication of disregarding the prevention protocols promoted by the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC), which are mask wearing, social distancing, hand sanitization and vaccination.

The rumor promotes drug abuse at a time where drug and substance abuse is on the rise in the country. Zimbabwe has the highest number of people in Africa who engage in heavy “episodic drinking,” at 70.7% among males and 55.5% among females, according to WHO. The rumor can have the impact of fuelling vaccine hesitancy, as communities turn to alcohol abuse as a COVID-19 prevention measure.

## Recommendations

- **Humanitarian and health organizations** working with women, men and youth can engage them in community dialogues, to understand the myths and misconceptions around COVID-19 prevention measures with special focus on the issues of alcoholic beverages and provide these target groups with correct and accurate information on COVID-19 prevention.
- **Partners working in communities** can engage with women, men, youth and migrants and compile frequently asked questions around areas of COVID-19 prevention and treatment, leading to the creation of a frequently asked questions (FAQ) Factsheets with correct and accurate information to the questions that can be distributed at health institutions, supermarkets, bus terminus, local markets and in schools to increase the flow of good, timely, accurate and lifesaving information.

“Takapedzisira totengera vakadzi vedu nevana ma whisk mushure mokunzi mukamwa mukwava haubatwi ne COVID-19.” (Shona, Masvingo, Kobo, July 6, 2022).



**Translation: “We ended up buying whisky and other alcohol products for our wives and children after getting information that those who drink strong stuff like whisky will not be infected with the Corona Virus.” (Shona, Masvingo, Kobo, July 6, 2022).**

## WHAT'S BEHIND THE RUMOR?

The rumor highlights perceptions from some communities, who believe that alcoholic beverages or products can prevent and cure COVID-19, perceiving that the virus will likely infect the throat. This emanates from people’s hesitancy to get vaccinated for COVID-19 due to misinformation about possible side effects of vaccines. They therefore prefer to use other methods to protect themselves and their families from the pandemic.

The rumor is important as it reflects how communities are using the information they have, whereby hand sanitisers containing alcohol are used to kill the virus, to create myths and misconceptions around COVID-19 prevention using alcoholic beverages.

## FACTS

The MoHCC advises the public that there is no specific medicine to prevent or treat coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and seeking medical attention is recommended for those presenting serious COVID-19 symptoms. COVID-19 vaccinations are effective for protection and lowering the risk of getting and spreading the virus.

**According to World Health Organization (WHO)**, drinking alcohol does not protect you against COVID-19 and can be dangerous. Alcohol based can be an effective household disinfectant or hand cleaner in a pinch to help eliminate most germs.t However, the same does not hold true about drinking alcoholic beverages. It can be lethal if one inject a disinfectant meant for rubbing on surfaces and utensils.

### ORGANISATIONS WORKING ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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