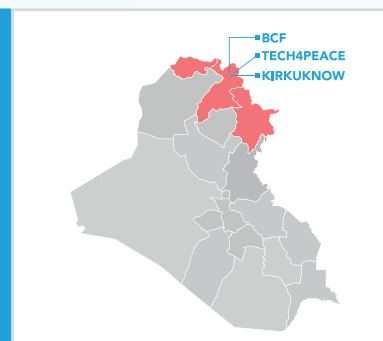


Introduction to Rooted in Trust

Rooted in Trust (RiT) is a USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA)-funded project by Internews that aims at countering the unprecedented scale and speed of the spread of rumors and misinformation on COVID-19 health response and COVID-19 vaccines among vulnerable populations affected by humanitarian crisis. In Iraq, Rooted in Trust works with media, community-based organizations, and health and humanitarian actors to build a healthier information ecosystem that is responsive to the needs of internally displaced populations in northern Iraq, with the goal of disrupting and mitigating the flow of misleading and inaccurate information.



About this Bulletin

This bulletin provides community and health workers with the latest rumor data identified among internally displaced populations in northern Iraq. The aim is to guide and inform risk communication and community engagement efforts within the COVID-19 response. It profiles rumors that have been circulating online and offline in Northern Iraq during September 2022. In total, 254 rumors have been collected. Data were collected through in-person listing groups with IDPs, as well as various pages, groups, and accounts that have significant user engagement from Facebook, Telegram, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms.

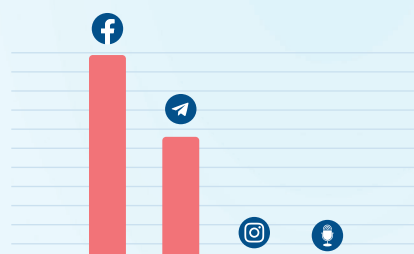
Methodology

In Iraq, RiT 2.0 collects, manages, and addresses any instance of online and offline COVID-19 and other outbreak rumors in targeted communities and population groups of concern (Women, Disabilities IDPs, etc.) in two local languages Arabic and Kurdish. Following the fact-checking process, rumors go through categorization, and qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Then we produce products such as this community bulletin to be shared and used by our target communities.

Top Rumor Themes



Source of Online Rumors



COVID-19 situation overview in the country:

254 Rumors Collected

Iraq recorded 1,634 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in September, an 88.4% decrease from August. Recorded deaths also reduced from 33 in August to 6 in September. Vaccination coverage remains low, with only 19.6% of people fully vaccinated. According to WHO, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases reached 2,459,505 by September 30.¹

Regarding Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever (CCHF) cases, the Iraqi Ministry of Health confirmed that "the number of confirmed CCHF cases has reached 311, including 60 deaths, from the beginning of 2022 until the mid of September. Cholera disease is still spreading in various areas of the country, in which until the mid of September, the confirmed cases have exceeded 1,250, including six deaths."²

Iraq is still struggling with political conflicts and forming a new government cabinet, protests continue in Baghdad and some other cities during September. Also, on September 28th, Iran used suicide drones and missiles to strike several Iranian-Kurdish opposition parties stationed deep in the Kurdistan Region, killing at least nine and injuring over a dozen others.³

What do people say?



Most of the existing recent cases are related to infections with the Coronavirus which are the symptoms of seasonal flu, not Coronavirus.



Coronavirus is ineffectual, and it is just a normal seasonal flu.



When the weather gets colder, cases of Coronavirus increase since it is a normal flu.



There is no disease called Coronavirus as it is just a usual seasonal flu.



The number of infections with the Coronavirus is almost numbered, and the existing cases are influenza.

Fact-checking:



- Flu is a seasonal disease that typically spreads in fall and winter, with peaking between December and February. Flu viruses can change from year to year, so the vaccine is updated every year to protect against new flu virus strains⁴. In contrast, COVID-19 is a very different disease – it can spread more easily than the flu and can cause more severe infections with worse symptoms than flu⁵. Furthermore, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and it can spread from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough and sneeze.
- Dr. Beena Shawky, Head of Communicable Disease Department in the Ministry of Health-Kurdistan Region of Iraq**, indicated that flu is very common, especially in autumn and winter seasons, and usually, the symptoms are fever, headache, muscle ache, and upper respiratory symptoms such as sneezing and coughing. She further elaborated that COVID-19 cases are still occurring due to the continuous vaccination campaigns and the recurrent changes in the virus nature with each wave of the pandemic.
- As COVID-19 variants continue to appear, COVID-19 vaccinations provide further protection to people who have already had the disease and boost the immune system⁶.

Recommendations:



For community members:

- Community members should protect themselves and others from being infected, wearing masks properly in crowded places, and washing hands or using an alcohol-based rub frequently. Community members need to visit the local health service providers to consult with the practitioners while suffering from severe flu. If a person still is unvaccinated, they should visit the vaccine clinic and ensure the correct age-appropriate product is administered based on the recipient's age on the day of vaccination, or whoever suspects any COVID-19 infection should get tested.

254 Rumors Collected

Recommendations:



For community workers:

- Public local clinics based in the camps should let the community members know about the Covid-19 vaccinations and inform them about the working days and timings for the period of different doses.
- Community-based organizations need to produce leaflets and brochures by including pictures, distinguishing between flu and Covid-19, and discussing their symptoms and prevention. Furthermore, there should be a focus on the fact that these products need to answer the needs of elderly people through pictures.
- Health workers should notify community members that COVID-19 cases are still occurring, and people should visit vaccine clinics to get the vaccine to avoid remaining the severe side effects also through increasing health communications with the clinics and keep assisting vulnerable populations by offering medical services.
- Provide support for people to visit vaccination facilities as well as utilize more with vaccine clinics in the field and encourage vulnerable groups to get the vaccine. Explain the risks of not using protective measures on communities, especially among those with limited access to healthcare.

Sources:

1. <https://ninanews.com/Website/News/Details?Key=998988>
2. <https://www.ina.iq/164999--.html>
3. <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iran/280920221>
4. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/public-health-focus/seasonal-flu-influenza-and-fda>
5. Similarities and Differences between Flu and COVID-19 | CDC
6. Benefits of Getting A COVID-19 Vaccine | CDC

Hotline

122



COVID-19 Snapshot



1,634

Confirmed cases



6

Deaths



19,264,920

Vaccine doses administered

Important Links and Helplines:

MOH KRI website: www.gov.krd/moh/
Self-Registration for Covid-19 vaccination:
Corona hotline: 122
vac.health.digital.gov.krd



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