

HUMANITARIAN SNAPSHOT

Rooted in Trust 2.0 Project

Iraq – September 2022

254

Rumors collected

What do people say?



“WHO brings good news about the end of Coronavirus.”



The Director of the World Health Organization is pleased with the good news: “The end of Coronavirus is looming.”



United Nations: “A new pandemic, more dangerous than the coronavirus, will soon hit the world.”



“A new variant of the coronavirus is spreading, and the vaccines cannot defeat it.”

What is the truth?



- ◆ These headlines are samples of what Iraqi media outlets published incomplete information on their websites and social media platforms during September 2022. They are posted by various well-known media outlets in both Arabic and Kurdish languages. The media outlets have thousands of followers, and these posts have huge views and engagements. Note that the first two headlines seem to contradict the final two; an example of how readers may easily become confused as to what's the real picture of COVID-19 in Iraq.
- ◆ The Director-General of WHO said of the COVID-19 pandemic that “the end is in sight” but added that “We are not there yet” and that it is more important than ever for people to get vaccinated and stay safe from infection.¹
- ◆ Some media outlets may have presented this as ‘good news’ or that it means that it is no longer necessary to protect against COVID-19 – however, this is not accurate and, in fact, the opposite is true. WHO emphasized that this may be a turning point and is “the worst time” to stop tackling the pandemic.²
- ◆ Responsible media outlets reported the news carefully, including the important statements from WHO that the pandemic is not over and that precautions – especially vaccination – are vital to ending the pandemic.
- ◆ Less accurate reports did not include the parts of the WHO Director-General’s speech that emphasized the need to continue protecting against COVID-19.
- ◆ News reports of “a new pandemic” or a variant that is resistant to current vaccines are partly true but may be presented in a misleading or exaggerated way by some media.
- ◆ It is true that some COVID-19 Omicron sub-variants are more resistant to some existing vaccines: the sub-variant BA.2.75.2 may be as much as five times stronger against COVID-19 antibodies than earlier variants, meaning it is more likely to infect people even if they are vaccinated or have previously been infected.³
- ◆ However, unvaccinated people are still at much higher risk: unvaccinated people are up to 15 times more likely to die from COVID-19 infection than vaccinated people, and 7.5 times more likely to be hospitalized.⁴
- ◆ Antibodies produced by people who have been vaccinated are more effective than antibodies produced only from a previous infection – even against Omicron sub-variants. So even though some Omicron sub-variants are better at evading antibodies, vaccination provides the best defense against severe infection.⁵
- ◆ New vaccines are in development that is better able to protect against Omicron sub-variants. These new vaccines are already being distributed in some countries and offer the best chance of increasing protection against COVID-19.⁶

Top Rumor Themes



Source of Online Rumors



What can we do as humanitarians and public health responders?

- ◆ Humanitarian and health actors should build a strong relationship with media outlets and journalists in order to work more closely on health issues. This can be done by establishing an active network to communicate effectively on the COVID-19 virus and other outbreaks.
- ◆ Humanitarian and health organizations should monitor the media and provide factual information on any health issues to the community. They can do fact-checking on the false information that spreads in the media and publish truthful information on their social media and other platforms in Arabic and Kurdish languages.
- ◆ In coordination with the media outlets, these actors should organize seminars and workshops for Iraqi journalists on how to cover and report the news about the COVID-19 virus and other outbreaks. Also, they should provide journalists with the latest information about sub-variants, new vaccines, and other information related to COVID-19.
- ◆ Humanitarian actors should coordinate with media outlets in launching COVID-19 vaccination campaign, as there are no mass media vaccination campaigns at the moment.

Sources

- 1 End of COVID pandemic is ‘in sight’ –WHO chief | Reuters
- 2 End of Covid pandemic ‘in sight’, says World Health Organization | Coronavirus | The Guardian
- 3 BA.2.75.2 Variant: What We Know About ‘Centaurus,’ Vaccines | Time
- 4 The omicron subvariant dominating U.S. COVID-19 cases is more vaccine-resistant : NPR
- 5 <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/five-things-weve-learned-about-ba4-and-ba5-omicron-variants>
- 6 Adapted vaccine targeting BA.4 and BA.5 Omicron variants and original SARS-CoV-2 recommended for approval | European Medicines Agency (europa.eu)

We welcome your feedback, questions, and suggestions. Please contact:

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