

LEBANON SITUATION REPORT

A monthly situation report aimed at tackling COVID-19 rumors to debunk the "infodemic"

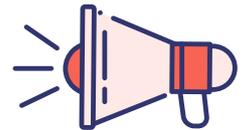
October 2022 | #8

About RiT

Rooted in Trust is collecting, analyzing and responding to rumors in 10 countries with generous support from USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA). We focus on equipping journalists and humanitarian communicators with the tools they need in the languages they prefer, to combat rumors and misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

How we do it

We identify and analyze rumors to help humanitarian actors and health workers better inform their Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) strategies.



Situation by the Numbers (WHO)

- Covid-19 cases reported during October 2022: **1,343**
- Total number of deaths: **10,706**
- Latest reported cases per day: **81**
- Vaccine doses during October: **11,761**
- First dose: **3,795**
- Second dose: **2,541**
- Third dose: **4,057**
- Fourth dose: **1,368**

Introduction

The total number of COVID-19 cases reported in October (1,343) significantly decreased compared to September (5,839). The total number of COVID-19 cases are likely underreported as many people have stopped taking PCR tests, which have been reported as being too costly and inaccessible to many given Lebanon's compounding crises. High vigilance continues to be recommended in order to avoid overwhelming the health services. People have recently shifted their focus to Lebanon's current Cholera outbreak, likely linked to people drinking contaminated water or eating contaminated food. The WHO is supporting the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) with its cholera response.



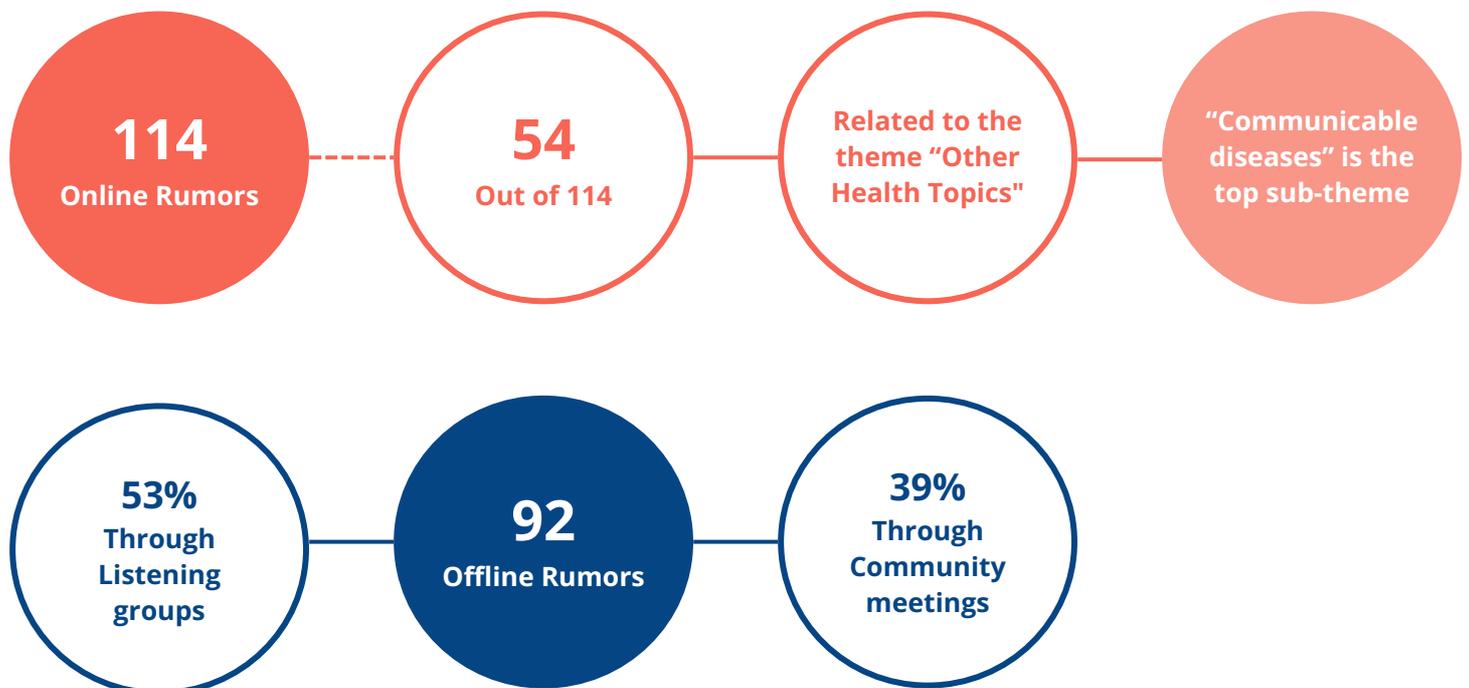
Data Overview

In the month of October 2022, misinformation continued to spread through social media platforms in Lebanon with 114 online rumors collected by Social Media Monitors. It is the first time since July 2022 (Rooted in Trust 2.0 methodology introduced the theme "Other Health Topic") that the number of rumors revolving around the theme of "Other Health Topic" (54) is almost equal to that of the theme "COVID-19 General" (53). Of the "Other Health Topic" rumors, 26% were medium-risk, most of which were found on Twitter and predominantly contained sentiments of fear and apathy.

Across all sub-themes, the top sub-theme continues to be "Communicable disease" (41) with 73% of these rumors making reference to the Cholera outbreak in Lebanon, marking a significant shift away from Monkeypox-related rumors. These rumors contain content on the outbreak's origin, prevention, and treatment. One of the rumors collected is high-risk, encouraging people to soak their vegetables in bleach for half an hour before consumption for sterilization purposes so as to not get Cholera.

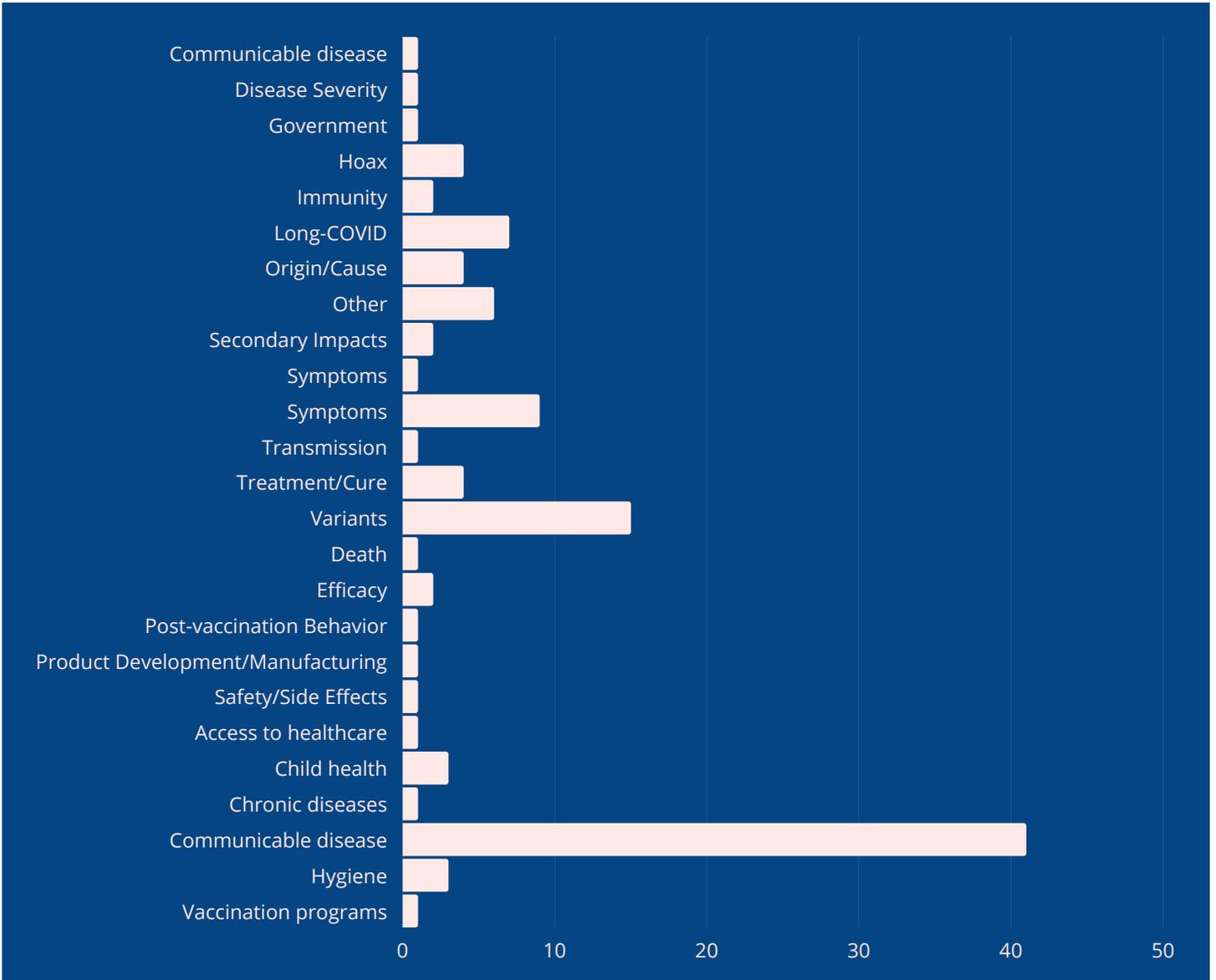
In October 2022, a total of 92 offline rumors were collected in the Bekaa region through Listening Groups (53%), Community Meetings (39%), and Door-to-Door Interviews (8%). Most offline rumors relate to the theme of "COVID-19 Vaccine" (82%), whereas only 7% of the offline rumors make reference to the theme "Other Health Topic", none of which mention Cholera.

For the offline rumors, the top sub-theme continues to be "Death" (27%), specifically that people fear taking the COVID-19 vaccine as it reportedly causes death after inoculation. This is closely followed by the sub-theme "Safety/Side Effects" (23%) where people mentioned they were scared that the COVID-19 vaccine would be bad for their health, especially if they have other pre-existing health conditions. Rumors also referred to the COVID-19 vaccine as being fraudulent and a means of experimentation on people.

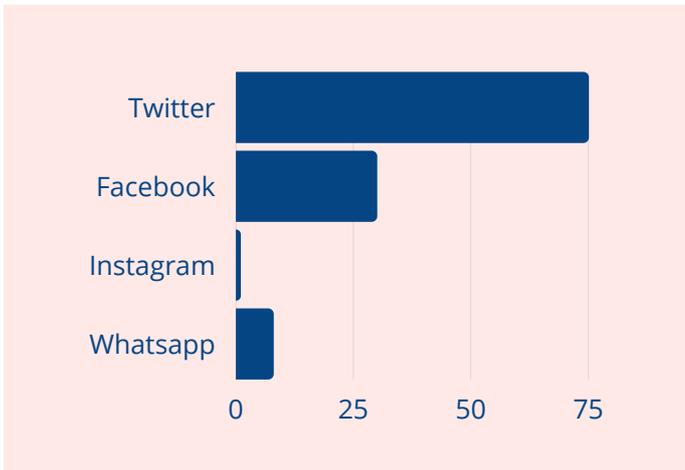


KEY THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

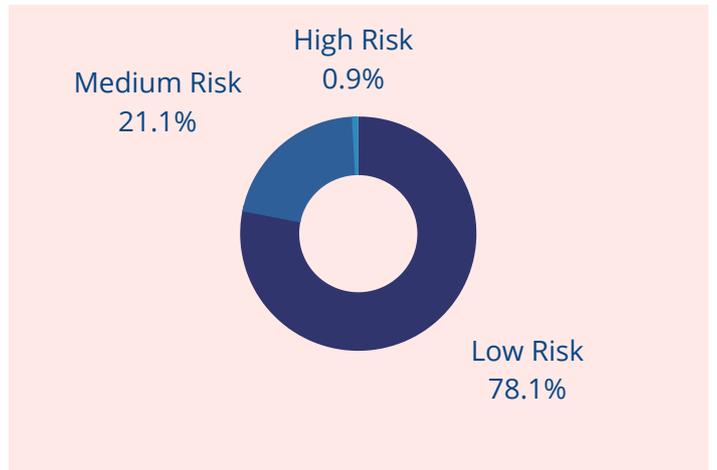
Total Number of Rumors Online for October 2022: 114



Channels



Risk Levels



Analysis

Compared to the month of September, October saw a notable 19% decrease in the total number of online and offline rumors that were collected. This is likely due to people's focus on non-health related matters given Lebanon's compounding crises. October was significantly politically-focused with the supposed voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and President Michel Aoun leaving office with no successor in line to replace him.

As predicted last month, there was a substantial increase in the number of rumors from the sub-theme "Communicable disease" with specific reference to the Cholera outbreak that was declared on 6 October, 2022. According to the WHO, Lebanon has 913 suspected Cholera cases and 14 associated deaths, with more than one third of cases being very severe, leading to hospitalization. None of the offline rumors made reference to Cholera yet, but this is likely to change in the upcoming months given the outbreak has been predicted to increase in numbers and continue to spread throughout Lebanon. Currently cases have only been reported in Akkar, Tripoli, Minieh-Doniyyeh, Baalbeck, and Keserwan.

As seen in previous months with the emergence of new viruses such as COVID-19 and Monkeypox, online rumors surrounding Cholera have followed similar trends previously seen for other viruses such as it being a hoax or using bleach for sterilization purposes.

People living in crowded areas or informal tented settlements may be at a higher risk of contracting cholera given disruption/lack of access to healthcare services, clean water, sanitation, and hygiene. The MOPH has designated 12 government hospitals as Diarrhea Treatment Centers. The International Coordination Group approved the MOPH proposal of 600,000 doses of cholera vaccine targeting the most vulnerable population groups, specifically refugees and host communities.

While the total number of vaccine doses administered in October continue to decrease, both online and offline rumors about the theme of "COVID-19 Vaccine" and sub-theme of "Death" continue to be trending. This means that awareness is still needed in order to successfully change attitudes and acceptance, especially amongst vulnerable population groups who continually believe they will die two years after inoculation.

Contact

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For more information on the project, visit

- <https://internews.org/resource/rooted-trust-rumor-bulletins-lebanon/>
- <https://rootedintrust.org/countries/lebanon/>