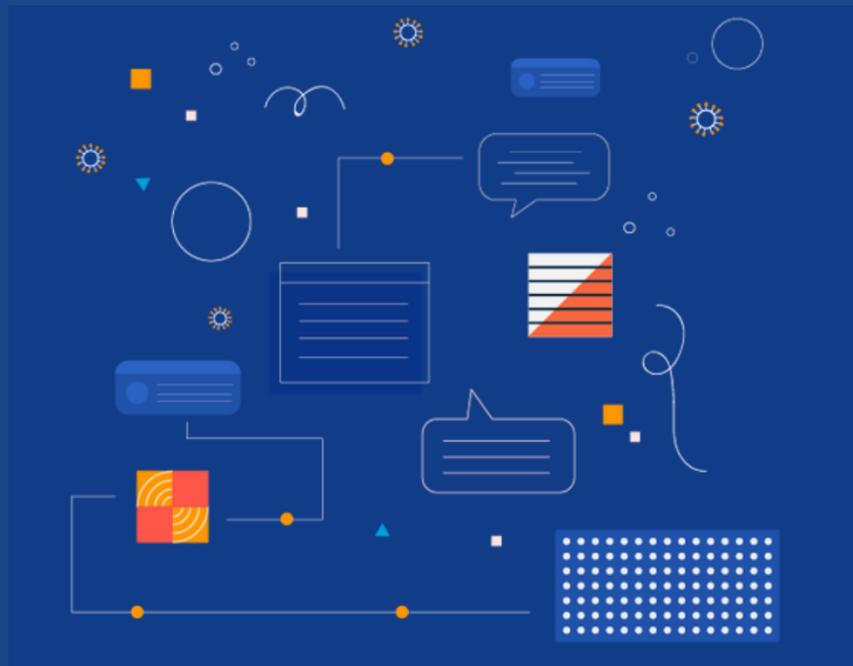


# COVID-19 and Health Rumors

Afghanistan Humanitarian Bulletin #3, 2022 (January - September)

## 2 key themes

- COVID-19 vaccine efficacy and side effects: are American vaccines less effective and harmful? (Anti-West sentiment)
- Covid-19 cure and treatment: can smoking hashish cure or treat Covid-19?



## This is Rooted in Trust

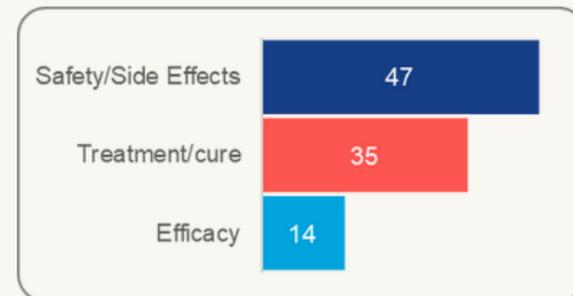
Rooted in Trust (RiT) is a USAID BHA-funded project run by Internews to support humanitarian, public health agencies and local media to combat and manage the spread of rumors and misinformation about COVID-19. This regular collection of community insights aims to provide humanitarian and public health agencies ideas to integrate and align their risk communication activities with community perspectives and provide information according to the needs to the community. In Afghanistan, Internews is collaborating with local media partners and the Risk Communication and Community Engagement Sub-Working Group (RCCE SWG).

The rumors highlighted in this bulletin are the examples of hundreds of rumors that were collected by Internews, Dari, Pashto and English, from public and private social media spaces from January to September 2022.

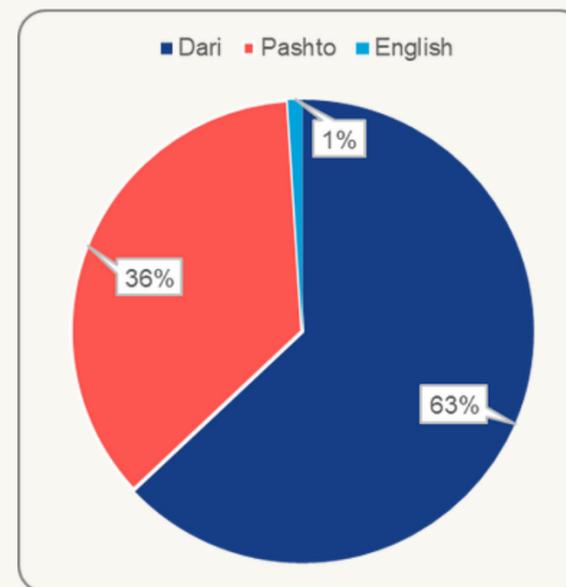
In this issue we focus on rumors trending about COVID-19 vaccine (American vaccines) efficacy and COVID-19 cure and treatment.

**704** rumors collected

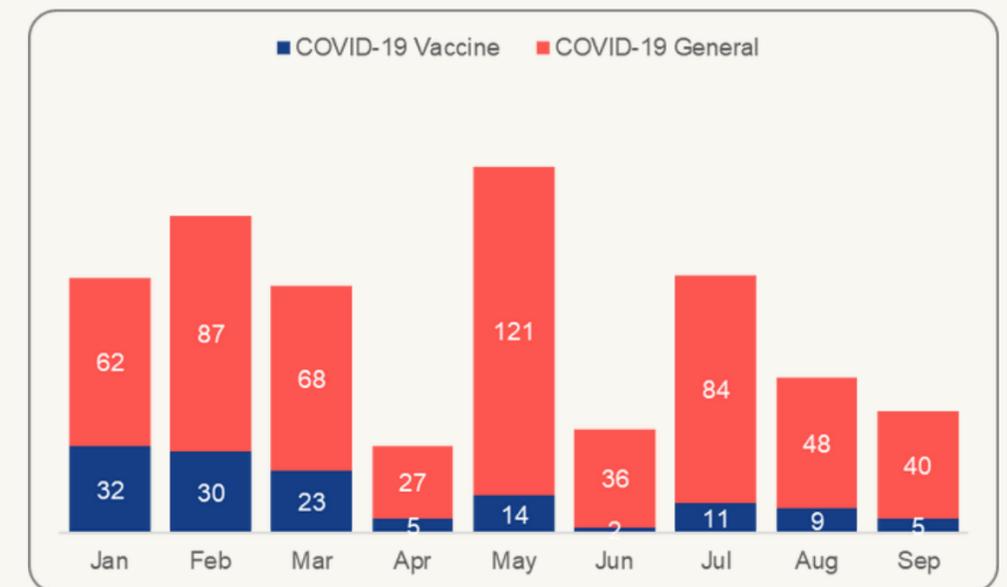
### RUMOR THEMES



### RUMORS LANGUAGE



### COVID-19 AND COVID-19 VACCINES RUMORS



## COVID-19 snapshot September 2022\*



**197,342** cases  
Sept 2022



**3,891,067** Fully vaccinated  
Jan 2022



**10,174,909** Fully vaccinated  
Sept 2022

### COVID-19 Info events

News, events & announcements that may impact online discourse

1 In late August, the number of COVID-19 cases increased in different part of Afghanistan. The Ministry of Public Health acknowledged the increase of COVID-19 cases and asked the public to take the Ministry's advice and recommendations seriously.

2 While being worried about the resurgence of COVID-19 virus in the country, some Afghan doctors asked people to take the COVID-19 Vaccine in order to prevent contracting the virus.

\*Total figures as of September 17, 2022

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## COVID-19 vaccine efficacy and side effects

### Are American vaccines less effective and harmful?

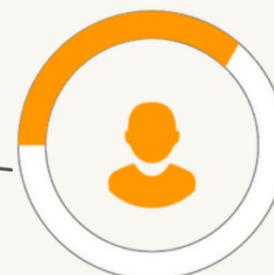
“ American vaccine? That means one million more people will die. ”

“ My advice to those who are in good health is to never inject COVID-19 vaccine, specifically the American [J&J] vaccine. ”

“ The United States wants to spread rumors of [COVID-19 cases] again, so the people get vaccinated with the ‘generation killer’ vaccine. ”

“ It is a biological weapon developed in American laboratories, such as COVID-19. First, they spread the virus throughout the world and then they sell the vaccines. ”

Spread in Dari and Pashto through Facebook pages

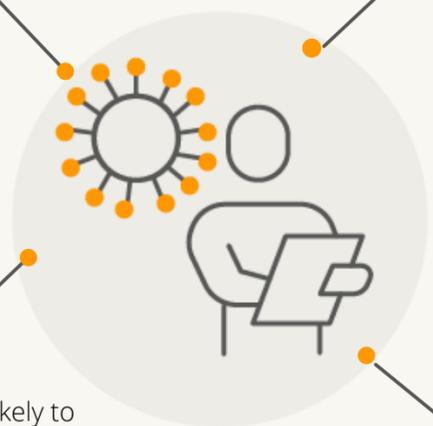


### What is behind the rumors?

Anti-West/American sentiments have existed for several decades in Afghanistan. Militants and fundamentalists have influenced people in the remote areas with the misinformation that vaccines, in particular the polio vaccine, are part of a Western plot aiming to reduce the population in Muslim countries. Due to the spread of misinformation, families in remote areas of the country, particularly in southern provinces continue to refuse vaccines, despite of the efforts made by health workers and community influencers. They have been deeply impacted by misinformation and rumors connected to anti-West conspiracy theories. Vaccine workers have been killed or beaten by extremists in different parts of Afghanistan, which indicates opposition against vaccinations. The oppositions that have mainly been against the polio vaccine could have had a negative impact on other vaccination - including COVID-19 vaccine campaigns.



## Fact check



The Johnson and Johnson (also known as (Janssen) COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective for all people aged 18 and above. It is in line with the WHO Prioritization Roadmap and the WHO Values Framework. [WHO](#)

People who have received all their recommended vaccinations are less likely to get sick and significantly less likely to become really ill, require hospitalization, or die from a COVID-19 infection. It's also possible that some people who are fully vaccinated could get COVID infections without showing any signs or symptoms. However, vaccinated persons seem to spread the virus for a shorter period than unvaccinated people. COVID can potentially be spread to others by anyone who contracts it, whether or not they have symptoms. [YYF](#)

"The Janssen vaccine is a viral vector vaccine. This means it uses a virus – in this case, a version of an adenoviruses, which causes mild cold or flu symptoms in people. The company has modified this virus to include DNA that codes for the spike protein on the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This spike protein is one of the virus' identifying features for immune cells, and what the virus uses to weasel its way into our cells." [Gavi](#)

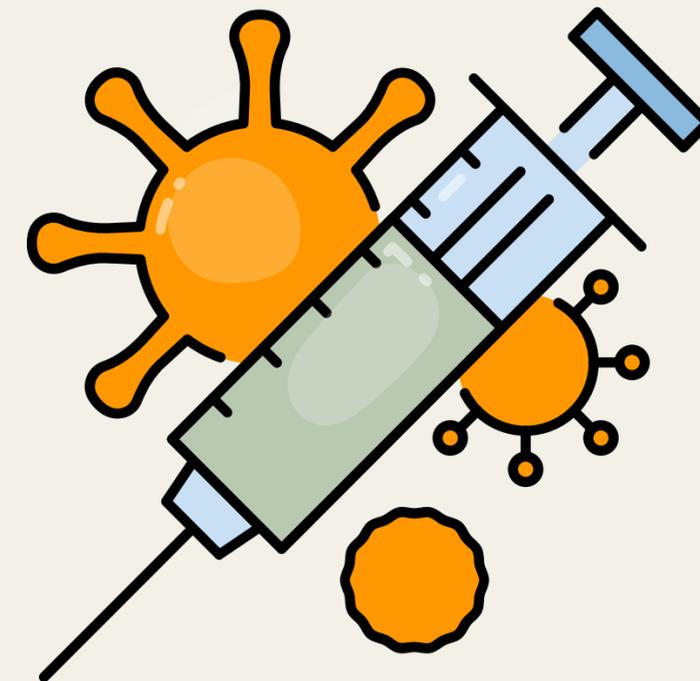
It has been demonstrated that all COVID-19 vaccinations now permitted or approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and advised by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for use in the United States help protect individuals who are vaccinated from becoming really ill, requiring hospitalization, or even passing away from COVID-19. The immunizations also aid in protecting those in the patient's immediate vicinity. [YYF](#)

## Why does it matter?

These rumors can further strengthen the anti-West sentiment that exists in the country following years of foreign intervention and the pandemic – and may deter people from the COVID-19 and other vaccines. It could also encourage people to avoid taking precautionary measures against dangerous diseases including COVID-19. The rumors have the potential to strengthen the existed obstacles against immunizing communities across the country and may instigate attacks on vaccinators.

## Why does it stick?

- Much of the Afghan population lives in rural areas and they may rely on information they receive from religious leaders.
- People can easily believe that vaccination campaigns are the West political projects and could be harmful for Muslim communities.
- Social media is a strong communication tool, and the rumors can encourage people not to get vaccinated and to oppose efforts by health workers.
- People who live in tribal areas across Afghanistan and Pakistan border have been highly influenced by their religious leaders and other local elders who have negatively affected their perceptions and beliefs about polio vaccine in the past and this may impact perceptions about other vaccines.



## Recommendations



- Humanitarian and health workers should work with religious leaders and other community influencers to improve understanding about vaccines, how they work and where they are coming from including COVID-19 vaccines and those produced in the United States or donated by the United States.
- Humanitarian and healthcare organization can engage with Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs to address the issue of the vaccines and the anti-West sentiment in the communities.
- Work with national and local media to raise awareness about the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine and highlight the stories of those infected by the viruses. Through media awareness campaigns people could be encouraged to get vaccines.
- Work with the religious scholars who have high influence in traditional and social media to deliver encouraging messages and address the highlighted rumors.

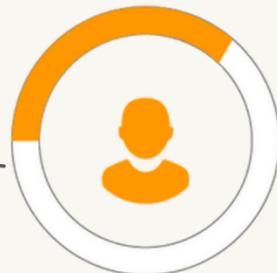
## Covid-19 cure and treatment

### Can smoking hashish cure or treat Covid-19?

Hashish is the vaccine for Corona used by about 60% or 70% people of Afghanistan.

Recent researches: the compounds in hashish plant can prevent from COVID-19 infection.

Spread in Dari and Pashto through Facebook and Twitter pages



## What's behind the rumors?

Rumors concerning the supposed use of hashish as a treatment for COVID-19 have been recurrent throughout the pandemic. However, in the first quarter of 2022 we registered a particular increase in the instances of this rumor within our rumor tracking data. The discussion took place in many social media platforms, in particular on Facebook, which is a dominant social media channel with largest number of users in Afghanistan. Such rumors have appeared on social media since the beginning of the pandemic and are connected to the belief and practice that many Afghan people have on treatment of various diseases with traditional medicine. Similar rumors have been discussed in other countries too.

The particular traction and risks associated with this rumor are exacerbated by the historical role that hashish plays in the context of Afghanistan. Hashish, also known as chars in Afghanistan, is produced from cannabis plant resin and is typically consumed by smoking. Some historical records show that it has also been used in drinks combined with other ingredients. Although it is not legalized, hashish is massively and openly grown, processed and consumed across the country.

An article by [Afghanistan Analysis Network](#), explains the complicated legal status of hashish in Afghanistan: "In Islamic societies, the consumption of hashish has usually enjoyed an unclear juridical status, especially when compared to alcohol. Religious leaders and rulers have occasionally tried to disincentivize or even prohibit its consumption, but such a ban never enjoyed wide consensus among scholars of Islamic law."

Afghanistan is considered to have one of the world's longest continuous cannabis cultures, as evidenced by the wide range of cannabis-based goods found across the country. Despite the fact that hashish is abundantly grown, most Afghans do not eat the dried flowers, known as ganja (marijuana in the West). Instead, they prefer to smoke chars.

The cultural relevance of hashish in Afghanistan can explain why social media users and people in communities have continually claimed and spread the misinformation that smoking hashish can prevent and treat Covid-19 infections.



## Fact check



There is no evidence to indicate that hashish can be used to treat COVID-19. The World Health Organization advises avoiding smoking to treat coronavirus, and studies show that smoking hashish increases the risk of lung infections like pneumonia, which occurs in more severe coronavirus cases. [Reuters](#)

Hashish has not been demonstrated to be useful in the treatment of Covid-19, according to medical professionals. Hashmatullah Faizi, an ICU specialist at the Afghan-Japan Hospital, explained that, like opium, hashish is an opioid drug that relieves pain. He said that the use of hashish and opium briefly alleviated pain, and that some people used them to relieve pain in the Covid-19 patients who were in extreme pain. [Pajhwok](#)

The use of hashish and opium for the treatment of COVID-19 is not only unsuccessful, but also addictive and weakening, according to religious expert Mufti Shams-ur-Rehman Frutan, who said that such medication is inappropriate in Islam. He stated that although specialized physicians have not confirmed that opium and hashish are effective, it is still inappropriate to consume them, and even if they do, there are still halal alternatives available. [Pajhwok](#)

According to Baz Mohammad Sherzad, an Afghan health expert, consumption of hashish to treat coronavirus was not scientifically approved. He described hashish use as hazardous to humans, particularly the Covid-19 patients, and claimed that such narcotics rendered individuals addicted and sick. Hashish, like tobacco, contains ammonia and hydrogen cyanide, as well as harmful substances like agave, according to experts, causing damage to the respiratory system, lungs, persistent cough, and phlegm. [Pajhwok](#)

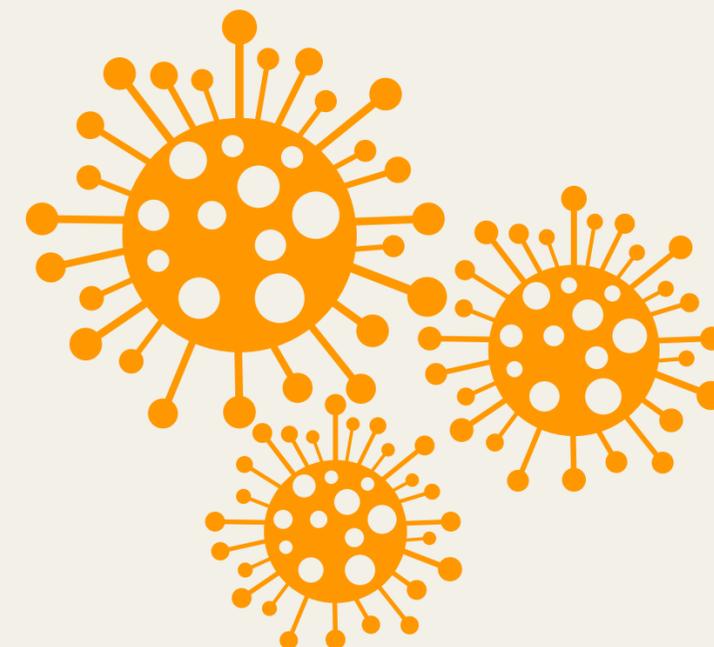


## Why does it matter?

- Many people in Afghanistan believe that smoking hashish can prevent and treat COVID-19 infections. By spreading these rumors people would put their general health at risk and risk addictive behaviors.
- According to health professionals, the first dab of hashish creates a false sense of happiness, and regular usage creates a strong bond that pushes the user to ingest the substance because he or she cannot function without it.
- These rumors will encourage people not only not to take serious COVID-19 but to ignore vaccines too. Most likely that people would accept the rumors and rely on smoking hashish rather than getting the vaccine as hashish is easily accessible everywhere.
- Hashish is a substance made from cannabis or hemp that has an intoxicating effect. It is the drug that can be dangerous for health.
- Hashish is easily accessible and can be purchased at very low price across the country. Both poor and rich people are addicted in smoking hashish just like smoking cigarette.

## Why does it stick?

- The rumors are strongly connected to people's traditional belief that hashish can cure various illnesses such as high level of cholesterol and glucose in human body.
- All over the country, particularly in northern provinces smoking hashish is common among men, young, teenagers and even women and is widely used for having fun time.



# Recommendations



- Humanitarian and health workers should work with community influencers to increase awareness about the risk of COVID-19 and effective treatments for the disease.
- Humanitarian agencies could create spaces and channels of dialogue with communities that are safe and respectful traditional knowledge systems and practices where the communities drive the agenda.
- Humanitarian and healthcare organization can engage with the Ministry of Public Health and other healthcare agencies in the country to address the misinformation as relevant to smoking hashish could treat COVID-19.
- Work with national and local media to raise awareness about treatment of COVID-19 and side effects of smoking hashish for COVID-19 infected patients.

## Content you can use

- ➔ [Everything about J&J Covid-19 vaccine](#)
- ➔ [The Janssen Ad26.COV2.S COVID-19 vaccine: What you need to know](#)
- ➔ [Your Questions About the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 Vaccine Answered](#)
- ➔ [آگاهان طب: درمان و پیش‌گیری از کرونا توسط «چریس» اساس علمی ندارد](#)
- ➔ [آیا سیگار مانع ورود ویروس کرونا به بدن می‌شود؟](#)



**We would love your feedback on this product! Contact us also to join our mailing list, collaborate and share data. Please contact Mir Rohullah Sadat, Senior Program Coordinator, Internews at [msadat@internews.org](mailto:msadat@internews.org).**

- 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 in the COVID-19 crisis.

