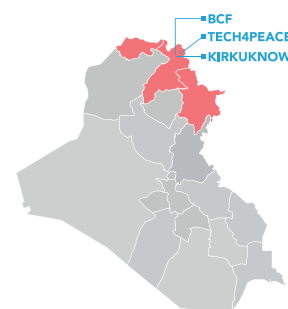## Introduction to Rooted in Trust

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.
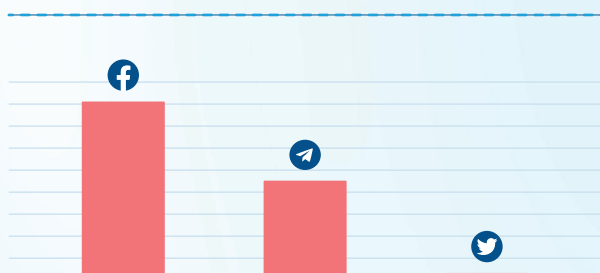
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About this Bulletin

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 Norther Iraq during December 2022. In total, 170 rumors have been collected during December. Data is 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.

Source of Online Rumors

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.

COVID-19 situation overview in the country:

According to the WHO Iraq dashboard, Iraq reported 1,057 confirmed COVID-19 cases in December 2022, a 42.7% decrease compared to November. However, until December 2022, 25, the Ministry of Health in Iraq reported 1,074 confirmed cases of COVID-19.[1] Usually, there are different data from WHO and the Ministry of Health regarding the COVID-19 confirmed cases on a monthly basis. This causes considerable confusion about the overall situation of COVID-19 in the country. Death cases increased in December compared to November, in which there were five death cases in November, but in December nine death cases have been reported. Vaccination coverage remains low, with only 19.8% of people fully vaccinated. According to the WHO dashboard, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases was 2,465,545, and 25,375 deaths by the end of December 2022.[2] Also, a total of 19,552,980 vaccine doses had been administered countrywide. Out of these, 11,332,925 people had received their first dose, 7,944,775 people has received their second dose and 275,280 people had received a booster dose.

Dr Riyadh Alhilfi, Director General of Public Health at the Ministry of Health - Iraq, stated to the local media that "the doctors specializing in epidemiology in the Public Health Department are monitoring the situation in China," noting that "the increase in cases in China is the result of the Omicron strain and its variants, and it has high speed of transmission." He explained that "the Omicron mutant has become endemic in Iraq, and there is no concern about the mutated entry again, being the same mutant, but the new strain transmits faster than the previous strains," noting that "almost half of the influenza cases are Omicron, and the remaining are influenza (A) and (B)". He concluded by saying, "If a citizen is vaccinated and wears a mask, he will achieve 90% protection from infection with the coronavirus, even if he is in crowded places."[3] It is worth mentioning that Iraq ranks 1st in the Arab world and 43rd globally in COVID-19 a number of cases.[4]

"There is no more Coronavirus, it has been gone one year ago."
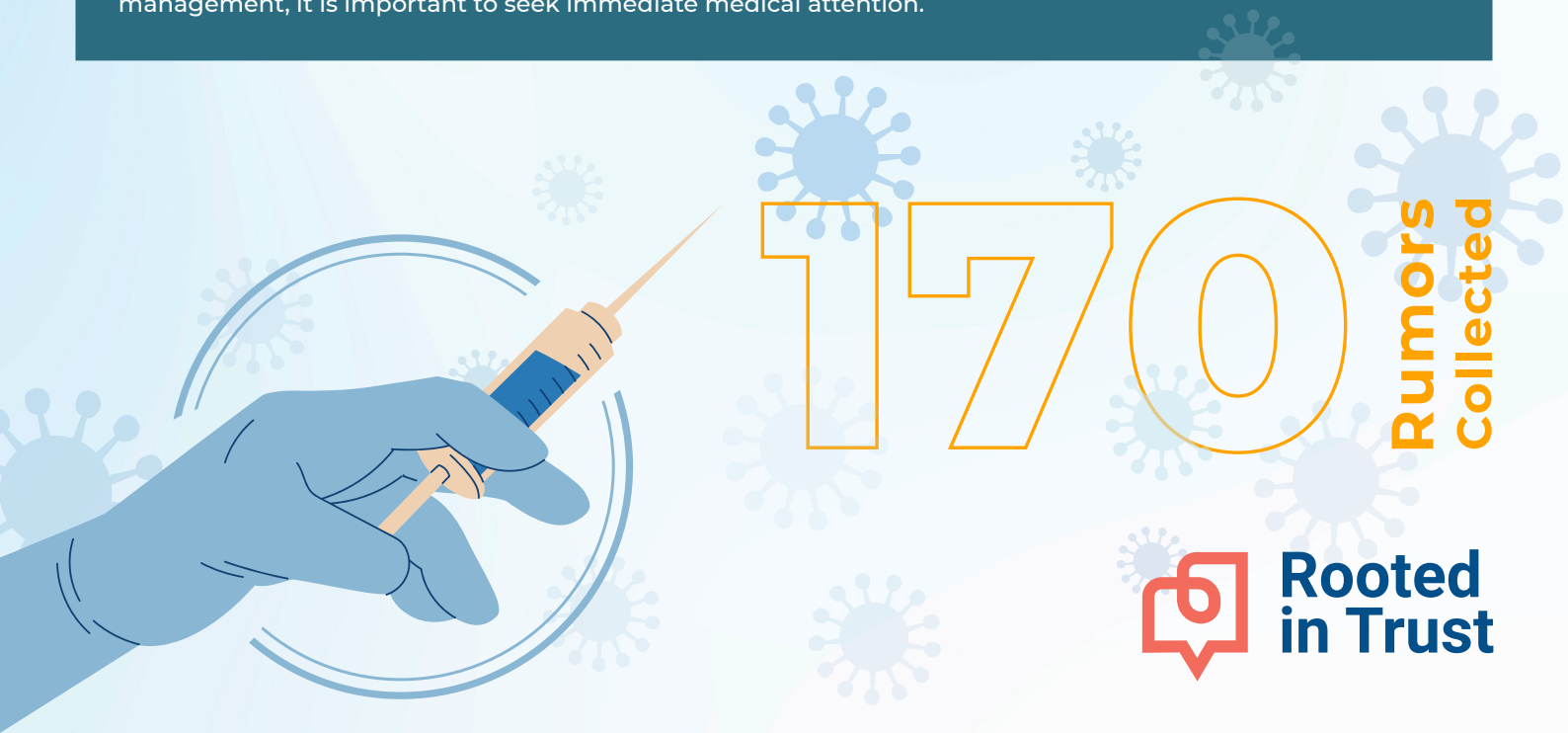
Fact-checking:

- According to WHO data in December 2022, there are 1,057 confirmed cases. This number is except for those people who were infected with COVID-19 and did not conduct a COVID-19 test.[5]

- Dr. Ali Fouad Shwany, a specialist in General Surgery, stated that according to the current pandemic situation, it is fundamental that most people should inform the camp management as per their camp they stay if they would like to get vaccinated. Concerns about vaccines, Dr. Ali stated that side effects and consequent hesitancy are serious factors that slow down the immunization campaign; thus, the scientific community needs to be cohesive in maintaining that vaccination is fundamental to containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. However, it is just as important to evaluate the safety of these vaccines and continuously monitor potential side effects.

- Dr. Mohammed Sardar Kamil, a Specialist in Internal Medicine Board trainee whose works in Government and private clinics and who managed a lot of COVID-19 cases stated that "Coronavirus disease is still an active disease worldwide, and one of the effective ways to prevent transmission of this virus is through active immunization".

Recommendations:

- Community members should verify the source from accurate and trustworthy information through the Ministry of Health - Federal Government, the Ministry of Health-KRG, and WHO.

- Local partners and International NGOs who provide health services and awareness sessions in the IDP camps must have joint sessions and better collaboration to address the risks of COVID-19 and awareness about the vaccination process, in order to establish effective communication with vulnerable groups and respond to community members' needs and concerns. If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, cough, and difficulty breathing, it is important to stay home, and contact local health authorities coordinating the camp management, it is important to seek immediate medical attention.

170 Rumors Collected

Rooted in Trust

Rumor #2

> "COVID-19 vaccine causes female infertility"

> "COVID-19 vaccine causes death."

> "COVID-19 vaccine causes paralysis."

> "COVID-19 vaccine causes chronic diseases."

> "COVID-19 vaccine causes mental illness."

Fact-checking:

- Most rumors collected during December 2022 were linked to the safety/side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine; people may experience severe side effects from the vaccine, these can include severe allergic reactions, blood clotting disorders, and other serious health issues. As Mr. Aree from MoH mentioned that this shows that one of the main concerns of people who are not taking the vaccine is about the safety and side effects of the vaccine.

- Various illnesses can cause a variety of psychiatric diseases. Meanwhile, Dr. Mohammed Sardar Kamil whose general surgery and works at Government Rizgary hospital reported that he didn't face any cases of psychiatric complications among those who had received the Covid-19 Vaccine.

- These rumors indicate that people do not have a clear and complete understanding of the common side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine.

- People may experience some mild side effects after getting vaccinated, which are signs that the body is building protection. These may include fever, chills, or headaches, but not everyone will experience the same side effects.[6]

- Dr. Ali Fouad Shawny, a specialist in general surgery, mentioned that there is no evidence to say that Covid-19 vaccines can cause chronic disease and leg paralysis.

- Covid-19 vaccines are the most effective way to protect yourself and others against Covid-19. They are particularly important for protecting against the most severe consequences of the disease, including hospitalization and death. The vaccines work by triggering the body's immune system to produce antibodies and other immune cells that can recognize and attack the virus. This helps to prevent the virus from replicating and spreading in the body and can also help to reduce the severity of symptoms if you do get infected. It is important to get vaccinated as soon as a vaccine becomes available to you, as this will help to protect not only yourself but also those around you who may be more vulnerable to the disease.[7]

- Dr. Mohammed Sardar Kamil, a Specialist in Internal Medicine Board trainee who's a member of the Covid-19 Vaccine donation team and handled many COVID-19 illness cases stated that he didn't witness any death due to the Covid-19 vaccine.

- Serious side effects that could cause long-term health problems are extremely rare following any vaccination, including Covid19 vaccination.[8]

Recommendations:

- Community members should contact a healthcare provider such as Heevie for further guidance on testing and treatments or any severe side effect or general health matters.

- If you test positive for COVID-19 or have any severe side effects, directly you should follow the instructions of the Ministry of Health by calling 122 (by adding your area code, for example: (Erbil 066122), whenever you have any concerns and Health matters either transportation concerns needed to a hospital or medical facility.

- Specialized doctors should be invited into the engagement activities through partners more and aware people on the available services in the camp.

- Having a good connection between Local health actors and government is essential for effectively managing the spread of infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and others. In this regard, it's important for the BCF organization health unit to quickly share information with government officials to implement appropriate control measures, this might include contact tracing, quarantine measures, and targeted testing as BCF is the camp manager in all IDP camps in KRI. Additionally, close communication between health actors and government officials allows for effective coordination of resources and more efficient response to the outbreaks, after the result of the health cluster closure, this is for being well-informed on the guideline in 2023.

Sources:

1. https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=549647933872248&set=a
2. https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/iq
3. https://www.ina.iq/174510--.html
4. https://www.ina.iq/174510--.html
5. https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/iq
6. Side Effects of COVID-19 Vaccines (who.int)
7. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html
8. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/safety-of-vaccines.html

COVID-19 Snapshot

1,057
Confirmed cases

9
Deaths

19,552,980
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

Hotline
122