



HUMANITARIAN BULLETIN#5

► Iraq May 2022

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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.

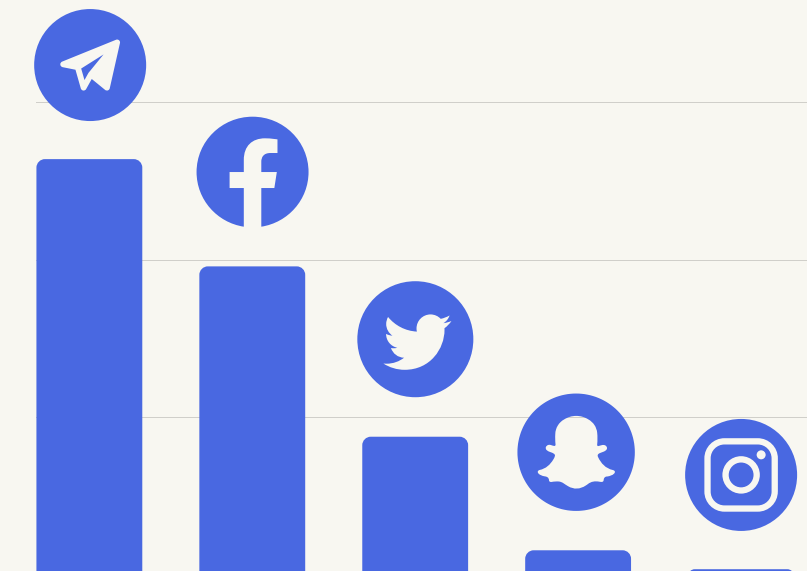
About this Bulletin

This bulletin provides humanitarian and health partners 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 common rumors across social media in Iraq during May 2022. In total, 241 rumors have been collected. They have been categorized as 77 medium-risk, and 164 low-risk levels. 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.

Top Themes



Data Sources



241 Rumors Collected

01.

Safety/Side Effects and Individual access/Affordability

“ I didn't take the vaccine because a doctor told me that vaccine will cause you diseases ”

Another rumor linked to the above rumor is:

“ A doctor advised me not to take the vaccine, because it takes five months after the date of the first dose to get the second dose ”



This rumor was collected in a listening group session in one of the IDP camps in the Erbil governorate.

What's behind the rumor?

This rumor highlights a gap in understanding about COVID-19 and the vaccination process in the IDP camps. Listening group participants said that the source of these rumors was the “doctors or medical staff” in the camps. Both rumors indicate that people are still interested in getting information but there is an information gap in camps.

The allegation is dismissing the "do not harm" principle that each of the doctors and medical staff in the camp should follow. This will put people's lives at risk in the current situation and when they face any other health issues and diseases.

The social division in Iraq categorizes doctors as the highest rank in society. Therefore, when doctors and health care workers are not properly informed about COVID-19 and vaccination, they might cause more vaccine rejection and hesitation among vulnerable groups. Also, a study from Care Organization[1] highlights the problem of high vaccine hesitancy among marginalized groups, and one of the key finds is that people are not confident they have enough accurate information, they are not sure that there is enough evidence that the vaccines are safe.

01.



Fact check



According to WHO[2] and MoH an interval of **21–28 days (3–4 weeks) between doses is recommended**. Depending on the vaccine, the interval may be extended for up to 42 days – or even up to 12 weeks for some vaccines.

Dr. Hazha Hushyar, at MoH Primary Health Care department **confirmed that the advised duration for taking vaccines is between 21 days to 4 weeks**.

The spokesperson of the Iraqi Ministry of Health (MoH), Saif Al-Badr, said, "All the vaccines that Iraq contracted for, have proven their effectiveness, and no cases of complications or hospitalizations were recorded"

Why does it matter?

The rumors have been captured through listening groups and focus group discussions among men aged between 19 to 45 years old. The rumors were captured inside two IDP camps where over 2,000 families live in. According to camp management information, one of the main trusted offline sources of health information for the camp residences is the healthcare workers. The misinformation provided by the healthcare workers included recommending natural remedies, "inhaling onions will improve breathing", and religious practices, "sujud every day will improve breathing", to reduce the symptoms of the COVID-19 and misinformation regarding COVID-19 vaccine side effects, for instance, "COVID-19 vaccine will cause diseases".

Healthcare workers providing misinformation were noticed several times inside the camp, which is an important public health concern since they play a dominant role in a successful vaccination campaign within the community. Therefore, acquiring inaccurate information from healthcare workers for people that are desperate for information will increase hesitance and anxiety which in turn will negatively affect camp residents' willingness to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

Recommendations



- Provide training for camp-based health workers on COVID-19 misinformation. Consider conducting surveys on health workers to assess knowledge and understanding.
- The local health partners must carefully decide on selecting health providers inside camps. **Awareness sessions and capacity-building trainings support the process of sharing accurate information with the DP population.**
- Humanitarian actors and MoH must stress the importance of active engagement with community members and share factual information on vaccines when needed.
- The prominence of taking extensive precautions of COVID-19 in the IDP camps such as extensive hygiene protocol is not enough, **it must be accompanied with in-depth knowledge, mindset, and awareness from community field workers, that influence the efficacy of healthcare workers in the pandemic response.**

02.

Safety/Side Effects

“ Monkeypox: the final say: There is no monkeypox, but rather it is the Herpes virus that infected the vaccinated population after destroying their immunity due to the genetic injection because herpes only affects people with weak immunity, and this is one of its distinctive characteristics.

See the first account proven thread about immunodeficiency and AIDS after the COVID-19 vaccines ”

<https://twitter.com/asad12q80/status/1527248920270843905>



Posted in Arabic on a Twitter public account. It had a total of 2,429 engagements including (723 retweets, 1,618 likes, and 88 quote tweets)

What's behind the rumor?

This rumor was posted on Twitter and Telegram by an immunologist who is also an influential social media activist with a large and active following. The rumor claims that “what is going on is not Monkeypox symptoms rather they are the manifestation of Herpes Zoster virus activation.” He also links the COVID-19 vaccination, claiming “that destroy people immune system” and calls it “genetic injection”.

The rumor is based on a conspiracy theory that claims that COVID-19 vaccines are a “genetic jab” that suppresses the immune system and causes herpes. The conspiracy theory also links vaccines to AIDS, which is a highly stigmatized disease in Iraqi society. There is a tendency behind this rumor which is the denial of diseases such as Monkey-Pox and the plotting of an alternative disease like Herpes Zoster. Due to recent outbreaks of new diseases, conversations on social media platforms are shifted, because people are not aware of the new virus and don't have information about its symptoms.



Fact check



Dr. Firas Jabbar Al-Mosawi, from the Immunization Department in the Ministry of Health Iraq stated that “It’s an unscientific statement, and there are no scientific indicators to prove the validity of this rumor. Monkeypox exists in several countries and appears with certain infections annually. There is a vaccine for the Monkeypox virus as it is closely related to the virus that causes smallpox; the smallpox vaccine can protect people from getting Monkeypox”

Dr. Aso Karim Director of Preventive Health Directorate in the Ministry of Health Kurdistan stated “COVID-19 vaccines don’t destroy the immune system, and there is no scientifically proven link between the COVID-19 vaccine and Herpes infection.”

American Journal of Ophthalmology Case Reports published a study about **COVID-19 vaccination and its possible link to Herpes Zoster**[3]. The study conclusion confirms that having only three approved cases presented in the study were diagnosed with "Herpes Zoster" in two weeks duration after taking the COVID-19 vaccine **is not enough to prove a definite causality between the two events**, there is a need for monitoring and reporting of potential side effects of the novel mRNA vaccines to ensure the safety of all our patients.

Why does it matter?

This rumor was posted by an influencer who introduces himself as a specialist doctor and “immunologist.” The influential social media activist has more than 25,000 followers on both Twitter and Telegram platforms, and there was a big engagement to the post, more than 2 thousand likes on Twitter only, more than 750 times retweeted, and more than 280 comments. In addition, one of the other reasons that make people pay attention to his statements is because of his status, education in immunology in England, and being a presence on global TV channels such as Aljazeera and many other Iraqi TV stations. Some of his videos on his YouTube channels reached 400, 000 viewers.

The rumor affects the way people evaluate pseudo-science beliefs and affects people’s judgment and decision-making in relation to the Covid-19 vaccination because the rumor claims that “it is the Covid-19 vaccines which cause Herpes Zoster and HIV.

The rumor feeds vaccine hesitancy among people which makes them think that the vaccines are not safe and will negatively influence vaccine acceptance, as mistrust and suspicion around the vaccine remain concerning. The rumor is fuelling more anxiety and fear among those who have already been vaccinated, and the concern gets only higher.

Recommendations



- People will continue having conversations about the new monkeypox outbreak. Monitor any further Monkeypox rumors in the community and share them with us through this form! (<https://ee.humanitarianresponse.info/x/0omvSYF1>). Also, be prepared to address questions about this outbreak – you can consult updated information here (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/situations/monkeypox-oubreak-2022>)
- Humanitarian and health actors must be proactive in carrying out community engagement activities to raise awareness about the importance of receiving COVID-19 vaccines while explaining the science behind COVID-19 and other unrelated viruses such as herpes or monkeypox. This will help in mitigating people’s confusion and prepare them for prevention.
- To prevent the spread of Monkeypox, the Ministry of Health in Kurdistan should be proactive in circulating important information about Monkeypox disease and how to recognize its symptoms to health care providers. This will help in building further capacity for outbreak response.
- Raising awareness of risk factors and educating people through social media and posters in the camps about the measures they can take to reduce exposure is the main prevention strategy for all transmitted viruses.

03.

Safety/Side Effects

“After checking and investigating Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever is a new lie to cover up the clot-causing covid vaccines. I matched all the pictures that I have received with pictures of clots caused by the COVID-19 vaccination, and they were 90% similar. The same movie and lies that is about hepatitis C virus, which is caused by the destruction of the liver by the covid vaccines. Every day, a new disease will appear, and the reason is known, all of which are side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine. The role of doctors is to publish any information and cover up any side effects of COVID-19 vaccines. the betrayal of doctors continues. Any cardiologist you visit, the first question that he/she asks you is “are vaccinated or not”? Cardiovascular injuries and strokes are number one in clinics, and the doctor who lies. Reveal the liar”



Posted in Arabic on a Telegram public account. It had a total of 13.8K views.

What's behind the rumor?

This rumor claims that Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHF) is a lie to cover up blood clots supposedly caused by COVID-19 vaccines. The person who had posted the rumor, claims that he had matched the pictures that he had received some of Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever cases with pictures of blood clots in vaccinated people. The dissemination platform of this rumor is Telegram, and the rumor came from a very influential activist of social media platforms with a vast number of followers.

General social media response to CCHF is chaotic, people are stating false information that mostly links the outbreak to COVID-19 vaccines, as well as associates it with the political and economic crisis in the country. This is due to that there is no clear picture of the outbreak among the people in terms of information and data. Also, so far there are no awareness campaigns from government and humanitarian actors as an action to make people aware of the outbreak. Therefore, such kinds of rumors are spreading rapidly among people, especially among communities that do not have a trustworthy source for receiving information.



Fact check



WHO Iraq Office in coordination with the IKR Ministry of Health confirmed that for the date of June 6th, 2022, **there are (142) confirmed Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever cases in Iraq with (24) deaths**, mostly in the south and central cities. In northern Iraq, there is one confirmed case.

Both Iraq and the IKR Ministry of Health circulated official letters about rules and regulations for combatting Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever to all health directories in 18 districts of Iraq which shows the seriousness of the new virus and ways to diagnose it through symptoms.

The risk of developing serious side effects from COVID-19 vaccines is extremely low. Some COVID-19 vaccines have been associated with an extremely rare syndrome known as vaccine-induced thrombotic thrombocytopenia which can lead to low platelet counts and blood clots forming in unusual areas. **There is no evidence that the vaccine causes heart attack, brain stroke, or red blood cell destruction**[4].

Why does it matter?

The author of this post has more than 25,700 subscribers, many of whom actively engaged with this post and shared it further. The comments under the post are supporting and disseminate additional doubts and call for people to stop getting vaccinated.

This rumor combines several current health concerns – COVID, CCHF, Hepatitis C – which makes it more attractive to the social media users and makes it seem legitimate – people are likely to have heard about these issues but do not know much about them.

Additionally, the rumor is determining and generating a risk towards the local Iraqi physicians who supports the Covid 19 vaccination process “is a traitor”, this may cause mistrust among the Iraqi communities as the word “traitor” is a person who betrays someone or something, such as a friend, cause, or principle.

The scale of fear that the rumor circulating is noticeable among the Iraqi communities, using horrific images and as well through the content, which is suggesting a broader range of immunization concerns, claiming that the Covid 19 vaccines cause Hepatitis C, blood clots, it also describes Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever as it is a blood clot, not a virus.

Such kinds of rumors about false side effects of vaccines and denying new viruses put community members’ lives in serious jeopardy of being infected. Moreover, hesitancy is continuously increasing among the Iraqi community, according to the MoH vaccine update is also reducing in the IKR. These rumors aim to raise community rejection against vaccines in general.

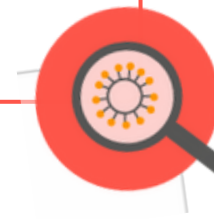
Recommendations



- Humanitarian and health actors **to be prepared for providing updates and awareness about inquiries related to CCHF, by referring to WHO** (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/crimean-congo-haemorrhagicfever#s>), and **MoH** regulation for CCHF through this website (<https://gov.krd/moh/>).
- **WHO and MoH have all the reliable information related to Hemorrhagic fever, Therefore,** health-related information and communication should be derived from these official and trusted sources and be shared with active health actors.
- Although Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever is an endemic disease in which cases occur from time to time, it has become a serious health problem as the number of infected individuals is raised in a short time. Hence, most health providers and humanitarian actors have no sufficient information about the disease and its symptoms. Therefore, **quick action is required from humanitarian actors to mitigate the risk of the virus by rolling in health service providers in educational trainings about the disease and how to recognize its symptoms.**
- Humanitarian actors should have a close coordination with media outlets in providing them with accurate information to raise the awareness of the community in preventive measures against transmitted viruses such as COVID-19, Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever, and Monkeypox.
- **It is important that partners and health clinics especially those who provide vaccines explain that there is no link between the COVID-19 vaccine and other transmitted viruses. The vaccine does not cause Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever or Monkeypox.**

Sources

1. https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Iraq-Vaccination-Uptake-Study-CARE_FINAL.pdf
2. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/getting-the-COVID-19-vaccine>
3. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2451993622001050>
4. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/side-effects-of-COVID-19-vaccines>



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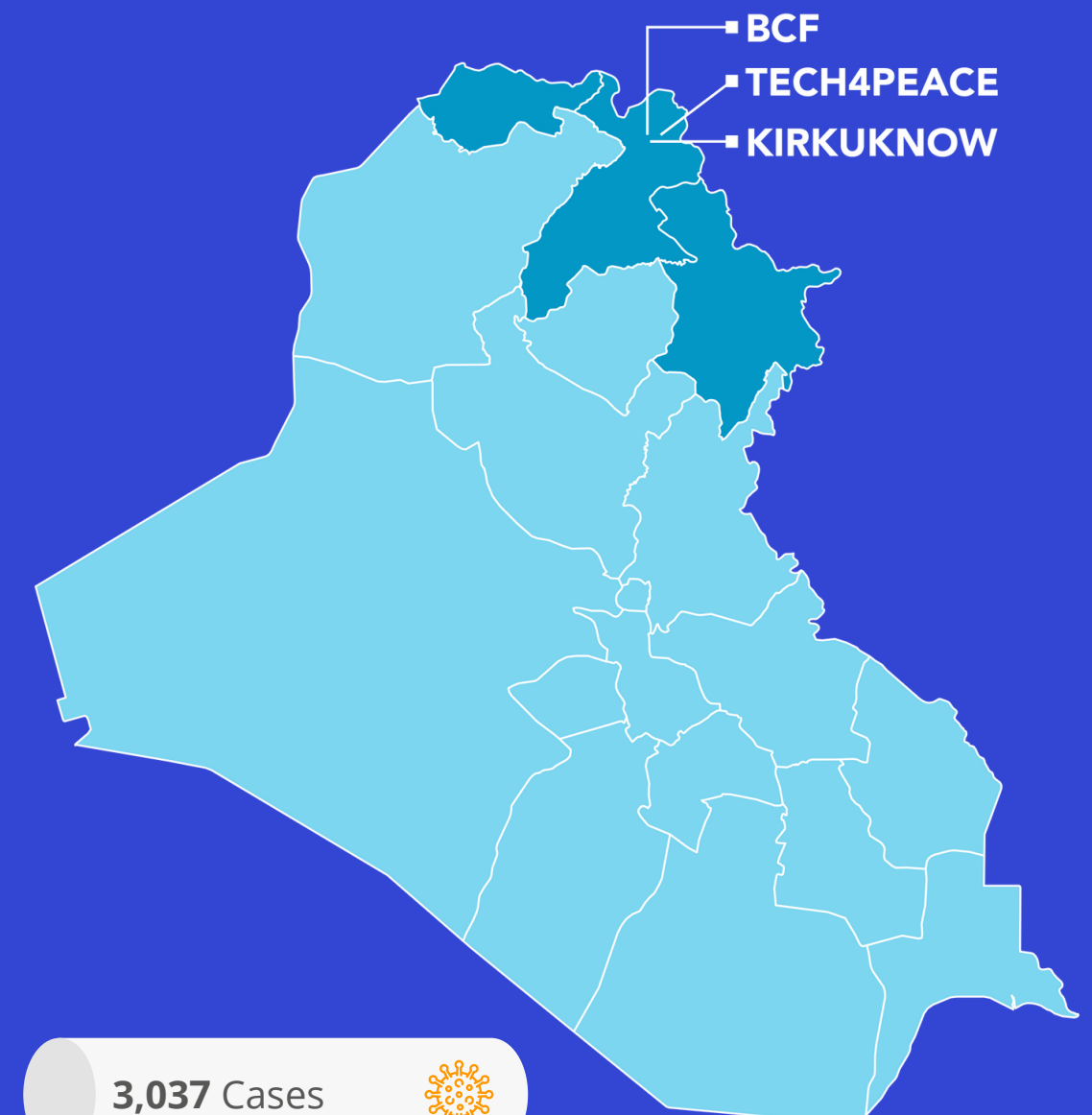
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Covid-19 Snapshot IRAQ



3,037 Cases



8 Deaths



18,279,217 Doses

