The Sudan Rooted in Trust Project aims to address COVID-19 rumors, perceptions, and misinformation by collecting and analyzing rumors found on Sudanese social media, and through listening groups with communities affected by conflict. This bulletin is based on an analysis of 897 rumors collected in Arabic, Angsana, Fur, Masalit, Nuer, and Zaghawa between 10 August and 15 September 2022, from Facebook and Twitter, and through face-to-face listening groups with communities affected by conflict and displacement in Al-Gedaref, Blue Nile, Central Darfur, East Darfur, Kassala, North Darfur, Red Sea, South Darfur, and West Darfur states.
This is the thematic breakdown of 897 rumors collected in Arabic, English, Arabic, Angsana, Fur, Masalit, Nuer, and Zaghawa between 10 August and 15 September 2022, from Facebook and Twitter, and through listening groups with communities affected by conflict and displacement in Al-Gedaref, Blue Nile, Central Darfur, East Darfur, Kassala, North Darfur, Red Sea, South Darfur, and West Darfur states.

51% of rumors about COVID-19 and vaccines have been shared by men on social media and during listening groups.
This is an analysis of the emotions expressed in 897 rumors in Arabic, English, Arabic, Angsana, Fur, Masalit, Nuer, and Zaghawa between 10 August and 15 September 2022. Internews found that 42% of the rumors expressed feelings of apathy and indifference. This was prevalent among rumors downplaying the pandemic saying that COVID-19 no longer exists in Sudan. Others expressed fear from the possible side effects of the vaccine.

COVID-19 and Vaccine Rumors Based on Risk Level

Risk breakdown based on the analysis of 897 rumors collected in Arabic, English, Arabic, Angsana, Fur, Masalit, Nuer, and Zaghawa between 10 August and 15 September 2022

- Low Risk: 82.1%
- Medium Risk: 17.7%
- High Risk: 0.2%
This is a breakdown of 182 rumors collected during listening group sessions held in IDP and refugee camps in Arabic, Angsana, Fur, Masalit, Nuer, and Zaghawa between 10 August and 15 September 2022. Internews found that 18% of the rumor data was collected from Sharg Elniel Camp in Central Darfur.

As of 7 October 2022, the Sudan's COVID-19 infection rates rose to 63,339 confirmed cases. As of 30 May 2022, a total of 8,179,010 vaccine doses have been administered in Sudan, and 6,651,268 persons were vaccinated with at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in all states of Sudan. Despite efforts by public health authorities to share up-to-date COVID-19 vaccination statistics, compiling and sharing current countrywide vaccination statistics continues to be a challenge in Sudan.
Tear gas does not treat COVID-19, in fact it can worsen a COVID-19 illness. According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tear gas is defined as “chemical compounds that temporarily make people unable to function by causing irritation to the eyes, mouth, throat, lungs, and skin”. COVID-19 is a respiratory disease, which means that it can affect our lungs by damaging and weakening them. In some cases, the lungs cannot function on their own. Therefore, being exposed to tear gas will increase your risk of developing severe symptoms if you have COVID-19.

In addition, The American Thoracic Society, states that tear gas can have short-term and long-term effects on our respiratory system which may help increase the risk of spreading viral diseases such as COVID-19. Moreover, being exposed to tear gas can increase the likelihood of developing respiratory diseases such as Pneumonia, Bronchitis, and Influenza.

If you become infected with COVID-19 and experience severe COVID symptoms, please seek medical care. You can also call the national pandemic hotline at 9090, to ask questions and get more information about the disease. Self-medicating or seeking dangerous remedies, like inhaling tear gas can worsen your condition and may lead to other health problems.
Vaccines help in protecting pregnant women and their babies against serious diseases that could put the baby or mother at harm; some vaccines are recommended by doctors before during, and after pregnancy. According to Mayo Clinic, COVID-19 vaccines are recommended if you’re pregnant or planning to get pregnant, as they have proven to be safe and effective in protecting you against severe illness from the COVID-19 virus.

Moreover, the World Health Organization, recommends that pregnant women take the COVID-19 vaccines along with practicing other precautions such as physical distancing, wearing a mask in public, and washing their hands with soap and water to protect themselves against infections. Furthermore, it has been shown that women who are pregnant are at a higher risk of delivering the baby prematurely if they develop a severe illness due to a COVID-19 infection.

Dr Majdi Sabahelzain, Assistant Professor in Public Health and Head of the Public Health Training Research Unit at Ahfad University for Women, clarifies: “There is ample evidence that pregnant women may be at increased risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

There may also be an increased risk of adverse pregnancy and childbirth outcomes. Some women who participated in clinical trials of two COVID-19 vaccines became pregnant during the time of the trials. When researchers followed up with these women the results demonstrated that COVID-19 vaccines are both safe and effective for use on pregnant women. The vaccines did not cause any harm to these women during pregnancy or to their babies during pregnancy, or after childbirth.”

Vaccines are one of the most efficient ways we can protect ourselves against viruses and diseases. Generally, vaccines have helped in saving millions of lives as they act as the first line of defense when a virus enters our system. Vaccines work by teaching our immune system how to respond to harmful trespassing bodies such as viruses.

If you are pregnant or planning to get pregnant, you should consult with your doctor for vaccination advice. For questions about vaccinations, you can also call the national pandemic hotline number at 9090.
According to the World Health Organization: “COVID-19 vaccines have been tested in large, randomized controlled trials that include people of a broad age range, all sexes, different ethnicities, and those with known medical conditions”. The vaccine trial results have proven that the vaccines are safe and effective in protecting against severe illness from the virus. Moreover, vaccines are safe for use for people with chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and kidney disease.

Dr Wael Mutwakil, Emergency National Specialist, says: “There are side effects to the COVID-19 vaccines. However, we need to understand the side effects and misconceptions, as these misconceptions have affected people negatively more than the vaccine side effects. As Sudan has not reached the 70% target for public immunization, this puts us in danger if the world witnesses another wave of COVID-19. The impact could be an imposed lockdown, travel restrictions, and more lives lost.”

In addition, Mayo Clinic states that getting a COVID-19 vaccination can prevent you from becoming seriously ill, hospitalized, or dying from a COVID-19 infection. Moreover, getting vaccinated can help limit the spread of the virus between people. Dr Mutwakil also notes that COVID-19 vaccine side effects are rare compared to the number of people who take the vaccine and experience adverse side effects.

Dr Mutwakil clarifies. “All medicines can cause side effects, including the COVID-19 vaccines. Often these side effects are mild and subside in a few days. We should continue to take the COVID-19 vaccines, as the benefits outweigh the risks.”

As a healthcare worker, you should reflect on your responsibility towards others, as someone who is trusted by many, you should not be spreading misinformation as it could affect other people’s lives. When possible, healthcare workers should provide people with concise information so they can make informed decisions about their health.
RUMOR #4

“Surely you got the Coronavirus and you will have an infection in the olfactory nerve, and it won’t go away unless you take a spray with cortisone in it”

Woman - Unknown - Facebook

Loss of smell and taste is one of the symptoms that has been recorded as a common side effect of a COVID-19 infection, as the virus temporarily damages the sensory nerves. According to Cleveland Clinic, it may take months to recover.

Cortisone, also referred to as Corticosteroid, is a type of medication used to reduce swelling or inflammation caused by an injury or illness. According to a study carried out in Egypt and published by the American National Center for Biotechnology Information, the use of Corticosteroid nasal spray does not affect recovering your sense of smell compared to olfactory training (smelling four different odors twice a day to recover your sense of smell). Therefore, it is not proven that Cortisone helps in recovering your sense of smell after a COVID-19 infection.

However, Dr Erin Obrien, Rhinologist and ENT Doctor at Mayo Clinic, recommends practicing olfactory training by smelling four different odors such as floral (such as rose), citrus (such as lemon), eucalyptus, and cloves. You can smell each odor for 15 seconds with a deep inhale through the nose, wait 10 seconds and smell the next odor. Practicing olfactory training twice a day may help improve your sense of smell.

We should be cautious with medical advice offered on social media and should not act on it without consulting with a known, board-certified healthcare worker. If you are concerned about your loss of smell or other COVID-19 symptoms, you can call the pandemic national hotline at 9090, to speak to a healthcare worker, or visit your doctor.
According to the World Health Organization, some people do not experience any side effects after getting vaccinated against COVID-19, while some experience mild side effects after taking the vaccine. Minor symptoms can come in the form of pain at the injection site, fever, and chills. Usually, these symptoms go away in a few days. The WHO states that experiencing mild side effects means that the vaccine and our immune system are working. Also, in very rare cases some people may experience severe reactions after vaccination, however, the WHO emphasizes that these health problems or reactions are usually coincidental and unrelated to the vaccine.

Dr Tasneem Tajelsir, COVAX National Consultant for Adverse Events Following Immunization at the Ministry of Health, says: “There are no cases of paralysis following COVID-19 vaccination, but medically, a complete or partial loss of movement may occur due to blood clots. A COVID-19 infection can increase the risk of these blood clots. Most of the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines are mild and go away after a few days. However, there are some serious and rare effects such as blood clots and allergic reactions. Globally, it was found that blood clots because of COVID-19 illness are more frequent than their occurrence as a side effect of the vaccine. The probability of blood clots occurring after vaccination does not exceed four cases per million vaccination cases.”

In rare cases, there have been reports of adverse events following COVID-19 vaccination, which are severe events that could be related or unrelated to the COVID-19 vaccine. Cases of Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) were reported to the Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System in the US after receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines Guillain-Barre Syndrome as “a rare disorder where the body's immune system damages nerve cells, causing muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis”. It is worth mentioning that these side effects are extremely rare. In addition, there was no increased risk of GBS after taking Moderna or Pfizer vaccines.

It is worth noting that doctors continue to recommend getting the COVID-19 vaccine as the benefits far outweigh the risks. Vaccines are effective in protecting us from severe illness, hospitalization, and even death. If you have any concerns about the COVID-19 vaccines, please visit the nearest vaccination center or call the national pandemic hotline at 9090.
"People who have diseases if they take the vaccine will stop breathing or die. He added there may be damage after 5 years"

**Man - Age: 19-25 - Blue Nile - El Azazah Camp**

The World Health Organization recommends people with chronic diseases get vaccinated against COVID-19, as it provides them with protection against becoming severely ill if they contract the virus. Also, people with chronic disease are at a higher risk of developing severe symptoms, hospitalization, and even death if they contract the COVID-19 virus.

Dr Wael Mutwakil, Emergency National Specialist, emphasizes, "COVID-19 vaccines have rare side effects just like any other medication or vaccine used for treatment, prevention, or protection. We can take the vaccine acknowledging that it may cause some side effects, but we keep an eye on our health and reach out to a doctor if we experience any adverse events. We should not stop taking the COVID-19 vaccine because of these side effects because if we all decide not to get vaccinated, we could catch the virus again and experience the effects of the pandemic all over again."

There are minor side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine, such as pain at the injection site, fever, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, chills, and joint pain. Most of these side effects go away in a few days.

In some rare cases, serious side effects were reported following the second dose of an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, like Myocarditis, which is the inflammation of the heart muscle. This uncommon side effect is associated with chest pain, shortness of breath, and a fast-beating heart. However, it is worth noting that most people who experienced Myocarditis felt better after receiving medication.

If you or your loved one experience severe side effects after your COVID-19 vaccination, please seek care in the closest healthcare facility. You should also report any side effects following vaccination, by calling the national pandemic hotline at 9090.
Vaccines preserve life, and the COVID-19 vaccines protect all people, especially those that are vulnerable amongst us, like older people and those with chronic diseases that are at a higher risk of developing serious illness due to a COVID-19 infection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective and recommend vaccinations for everyone who is six months and older as it provides protection against becoming severely ill and helps protect our communities.

In Sudan, older people, and those with chronic diseases continue to be prioritized in the national COVID-19 vaccination plan, as they are more vulnerable to severe illness, hospitalization, and even COVID-related death. The vaccines have undergone rigorous testing and have been proven to be safe and effective for public use. In Sudan, the National Medicines and Poisons Board has also conducted a review of the COVID-19 vaccines and has approved their use.

Dr Hiba Sati Abdelsadig Ahmed, Epidemiologist at Khartoum University and Obstetrics and Gynecology specialist in Ireland, states:

“Vaccines go through rigorous procedures by medical authorities before being authorized for public use.” Dr Ahmed also adds that people have the right to sue the companies that produce the vaccine if they get sick because of the vaccine. Therefore, companies are very cautious about making sure that the vaccine is completely safe in clinical trials before it is approved for public use.

In addition, the American National Council on Aging underlines that COVID-19 vaccines protect older people against severe illness or death due to a COVID-19 infection, especially those with underlying health issues such as heart disease and diabetes. It is worth mentioning that older people who are unvaccinated are more likely to be hospitalized or die from COVID-19.

If you would like to get vaccinated, but have concerns, you should consult with your doctor or call the COVID-19 pandemic hotline number at 9090. You can also visit the closest vaccination center to you and speak to a healthcare worker about your concerns.
Dr Tasneem Tajelsir, COVAX National Consultant for Adverse Events Following Immunization, clarifies: “Hallucination is a rare adverse event if it is related to the vaccine. Neurological and psychological adverse events may occur after vaccinations but rarely so and at very low rates.” She adds that even if hallucination occurs it could be a result of another condition, and not necessarily a reaction or side effect of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Dr Tajelsir adds: “Fever, headache, pain on injection sight, and general fatigue are normal, minor side effects that occur after a COVID-19 vaccination and for any other vaccine. It is evidence as well of the effectiveness of the vaccine, and usually, it does not last for more than three days.” Dr Tajelsir advises taking paracetamol if you get a headache. However, if your symptoms worsen, please seek care in the nearest healthcare facility.

Dr Tajelsir emphasizes that proper management of adverse events could mitigate expected harm or risks. If you or your loved ones experience any severe side effects or reactions following your COVID-19 vaccination, please refer to the nearest hospital or clinic for urgent care. You should also report any side effects (mild or severe) or reactions following vaccination by calling the pandemic hotline at 9090.
"I do not know where they brought the vaccine from, so why should I take it"

**Woman - Age: 26-35 - Blue Nile - Geisan**

Vaccines go through strict clinical trials before they are approved for public use. This is the case for all vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccines. There are **four approved vaccines in Sudan**, Oxford-AstraZeneca which was developed by the Swedish-British drugmaker in partnership with the University of Oxford, BioNTech-Pfizer which was produced by the German biotech firm BioNTech and US pharmaceutical Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson vaccines developed by Janssen Pharmaceuticals, and Sinopharm which is developed by China National Pharmaceutical.

In Sudan, the Ministry of Health obtains the COVID-19 vaccines via the COVAX initiative, which aims to ensure **equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines** by providing vaccines to low-income and middle-income countries, like Sudan. The health authorities are responsible for vaccine distribution in the country and keeping the vaccines in good condition to ensure their safety and effectiveness. The Ministry of Health works closely with the World Health Organization and UNICEF to guarantee that the vaccines are handled properly and disseminated fairly.

If you want to get vaccinated but have concerns about the vaccines, you should contact the Ministry of Health pandemic hotline at: 9090.
Wudu (ablution) is a healthy Islamic practice that cleanses parts of the body with water five times a day before the five main prayers. COVID-19 is a respiratory virus that spreads through the air and is transmitted when an infected person coughs, sneezes, speaks, or sings. Water alone cannot kill the COVID-19 virus. Still, it is proven that the virus is very susceptible to soap and alcohol-based sanitizers.

The best way to protect yourself and loved ones from COVID-19 is by maintaining a distance of at least 1 meter from others, wearing a face mask when in public or congested areas, and ensuring proper ventilation when socializing with others, like keeping the windows open or sitting outdoors. COVID-19 is a global pandemic that can affect anyone, regardless of nationality, religion, or race. According to the World Health Organization, so far 63,280 people have been infected with COVID-19 in Sudan, and 4,961 people have died due to the virus.

If you have any questions about COVID-19 or would like to learn more about the disease, please call the pandemic hotline at: 9090. If you would like to know more about the best practices for washing your hands with soap and water, please read this UNICEF article: “Everything you need to know about washing your hands to protect against COVID-19”.

"Wudu cures Corona"
Man - Age: 19-25 - Kassala - Kassala
What are Rumors?

Rumors are currently circulating stories or reports of uncertain truth collected from first-hand sources within the community which could take the shape of a question, criticism, or general comments on a situation or topic. We should also note that rumors can be tricky to tackle because they might carry some element of truth.

RESOURCES

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT COVID-19 AND THE VACCINES

MINISTRY OF HEALTH FACEBOOK PAGE

COVID-19 VACCINES FOR PEOPLE WITH HEART DISEASE

DEBUNKING VACCINE RUMORS ON FERTILITY

COVID-19 Hotline - Serving all areas of Sudan: 9090

How Are Rumors Collected?

Questions, comments, and misconceptions about COVID-19 were collected by Internews’ analysts, who compiled and assessed feedback gathered from Sudanese social media and through face-to-face listening groups with displaced people and communities impacted by conflict. The rumors, perceptions, and misinformation identified have been assessed to be the most prevalent or damaging to the health response. The selection was based on the level of engagement and its potential impact on the community.

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

Mustafa Omer - Data Analyst - momer@internews.org