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 805 rumors collected in Arabic and English between 18 September and 26 October 2022, from Facebook and Twitter, and through face-to-face listening groups with communities affected by conflict and displacement in Al-Gedaref, Kassala, South Kordofan, Central Darfur, East Darfur, North Darfur, South Darfur, and West Darfur States.
This is the thematic breakdown of 805 rumors collected in Arabic, English, Arabic and English between 18 September and 26 October 2022, from Facebook and Twitter, and through listening groups with communities affected by conflict and displacement in Al-Gedaref, Kassala, South Kordofan, Central Darfur, East Darfur, North Darfur, South Darfur, and West Darfur States.

53% of rumors about COVID-19 and vaccines have been shared by men on social media and during listening groups.

539 rumors were collected during listening groups from people affected by conflict and displacement.

266 rumors were collected from Sudanese social media spaces.
This is an analysis of the emotions expressed in 805 rumors in Arabic, and English between 18 September and 26 October 2022. Internews found that 33% 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 805 rumors collected in Arabic and English between 18 September and 26 October 2022
As of 9 November 2022, the Sudan's COVID-19 infection rates rose to 63,558 confirmed cases. As of 29 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.
The COVID-19 vaccines do not cause Osteoporosis. Dr. Tasneem Tajelsir, COVAX National Consultant for Adverse Events Following Immunization, clarifies: “I would like to confirm that there are no reported cases of Osteoporosis in Sudan or globally due to COVID-19 vaccinations.”

According to the Royal Osteoporosis Society, COVID-19 vaccines are safe to take if you have Osteoporosis. The vaccine can help in protecting you against a COVID-19 infection, by reducing the severity of the infection and preserving life. In addition, Osteoporosis medications do not increase your risk of contracting COVID-19. It is worth noting that some people may experience minor side effects following COVID-19 vaccination, like a headache, fever, fatigue, and pain on the injection site. However, these side effects usually last for a few days. If side effects prolong or if you experience severe side effects after getting vaccinated, please visit the nearest health facility, and call the national pandemic hotline at: 9090.

Sudan's Ministry of Health advises that people age 18 and above, especially at-risk groups, like healthcare workers, pregnant women, older people, and those with chronic diseases, take the COVID-19 vaccine as it protects them from developing severe illness, hospitalization, and even COVID-related death.
“We do not trust the organizations that provide the vaccination, and I for a long time prevented my wife from vaccinating measles, and now we are fine”

Man - Age: 40-60 - South Kordofan – Abu Karshola

Both the Measles and COVID-19 vaccines have undergone rigorous testing and have been proven to be safe and effective. The World Health Organization highlights that Measles vaccinations between 2000 and 2022, have prevented about 31.7 million deaths. According to the WHO Vaccination Dashboard, the COVID-19 vaccine has been distributed to 203 countries worldwide, including countries in Africa, Europe, South America, and the Middle East. By 30 May 2022, in Sudan, at least 6,651,268 had received one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, which is about 20 percent of the population.

It is worth noting that the COVAX facility is tasked with providing fair and equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccine for every country in the world, especially low-income countries that have been most affected by the pandemic due to under-resourced health systems and the lingering economic effects of earlier lockdowns. COVAX is co-led by GAVI, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, World Health Organization, and UNICEF. Salma Mohiuddin, Public Health Officer heading the Nutrition Administration in Abu Karshola, South Kordofan emphasizes: “The Ministry of Health is responsible for vaccinations in the country, while humanitarian organizations are supporting partners in the health response, like the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Both the COVID-19 and Measles vaccines are very effective in protecting our communities. Ms. Mohiuddin explains: “Vaccines strengthen our immune system against a particular virus or disease. Should you contract that disease the antibodies built by the vaccine can combat the disease. The vaccines are a protection for you, your family, and your community. At the Ministry of Health, we are concerned with protecting the entire community.”

Measles is a highly contagious disease, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services, “If 1 person has it, 9 out of 10 people close to that person who aren’t immune will also get measles”. On the other hand, COVID-19 can cause severe symptoms, like shortness of breath or blood clots, which could result in hospitalization and even death. Doctors around the world advise people to take the COVID-19 vaccine as the benefits outweigh the risks.

Ms. Mohiuddin highlights the importance of Measles immunization for infants in Sudan, “Measles vaccines are two-dosed, and are essential routine vaccinations for babies. If a child is not vaccinated against Measles, they can become very sick, and if it’s not treated the child could die. Measles can also spread to other healthy children if not treated. It is essential that infants are vaccinated against Measles to avoid an outbreak and keep our children safe and healthy.”

We should assess all the information when making decisions that could affect our health negatively. Always make sure to get the right information from trusted sources. If you have any questions about COVID-19 or Measles, you should contact the Ministry of Health pandemic hotline at: 9090.
“The Corona vaccine injection consumes blood and makes a person need a blood transfusion”
Woman – Age: 26-35 – Central Darfur – Alhesahisa Camp

Dr. Tasneem Tajelsir, COVAX National Consultant for Adverse Events Following Immunization, emphasizes: “With the large number of people that have been vaccinated around the world, there are no cases of hemoglobin reduction. It is not true that the vaccine consumes blood. So far, over 6 million people have been vaccinated in Sudan, and there are no reported cases of blood consumption or a need for a blood transfusion due to a COVID-19 vaccination.”

All medicines, including vaccines, can cause side effects. In the case of the COVID-19 vaccines, there may be side effects or adverse events that occur after vaccine administration. However, the benefits of COVID-19 vaccination outweigh the risks. COVID-19 vaccines have proven to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

Autoimmune hemolytic anemia (AIHA) is a rare immune disorder. It happens when your body mistakes red blood cells for foreign substances and attacks them. Treatments include medication and in rare cases, a blood transfusion. AIHA is highly manageable but can be fatal if left untreated.

There have been very few isolated cases of AIHA following COVID-19 vaccination. AIHA may be considered as a very rare complication of COVID-19 vaccination that occurs following vaccination. The direct causal relationship between COVID-19 vaccination and AIHA is still ambiguous.

Rare cases of AIHA have been reported in European countries and the United States, where most of the vaccines used are mRNA based, such as Pfizer and Moderna. Therefore, the increased incidence of AIHA after vaccination with mRNA-based vaccines may be attributed to the higher coverage of these vaccines. However, the post-vaccination AIHA is manageable, and the advantages of immunization can exceed these risks.
“Corona is pig’s disease and we don’t have pigs in Sudan”

Man – Age: 26-35 – West Darfur – Beida Locality - Goubi

There are no studies that suggest COVID-19 can be transmitted by pigs, it is primarily transmitted human-to-human. COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease, which means it first infects animals, who then spread it to humans. There are lots of zoonotic diseases you might have heard of before, like rabies or dengue fever.

According to the US-based University of Minnesota, College of Veterinary Medicine, there is no evidence suggesting that pigs can become infected with COVID-19, or transmit the virus to humans. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention clarifies that the possibility of contracting a COVID-19 infection from animals is still very low. However, the virus can spread from people to animals where there is close contact.

The COVID-19 virus is commonly transmitted between people when they come in close contact with an infected person. According to the World Health Organization, “The virus can spread from an infected person’s mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing or breathe”.

You can protect yourself against getting infected by practicing the preventative measures set by the Ministry of Health, such as physical distancing, wearing a mask or face covering in crowded places, and ensuring proper ventilation in social gatherings, such as socializing outdoors or keeping the windows open.
COVID-19 can come to people in all age groups, young or old. However, the risk of severe illness increases with age, meaning older people are at a higher risk of developing severe symptoms. Moreover, people with chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes are also at a greater risk of developing severe symptoms if they contract a COVID-19 infection. People of all ages can have a chronic disease.

Johns Hopkins Medicine states that young people can become infected with the COVID-19 virus, and some may even develop severe symptoms, especially if they are chronically ill, such as people with kidney disease or heart disease. The UNFPA also states, “Young people exposed to COVID-19 are as likely as old people to become infected and contagious. They should therefore strictly follow national guidelines around screening, testing, containment, and care and practice social distancing.”

In addition, Dr. Mohammed Al Fateh, Internal Medicine and Diabetes Specialist reveals: “We are targeting all groups [for COVID-19 vaccinations] not only older people but also people under 30 and 20 to protect them from developing diabetes”. Dr. Al Fateh refers to a German study that found becoming infected with COVID-19 can increase the risk of developing diabetes. Therefore, COVID-19 can infect anyone regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity, and in some cases, it can lead to long-term health complications.

Young adults can protect themselves by practicing the preventative measures set by the Ministry of Health, such as maintaining a physical distance of one meter from others in crowded spaces, wearing a mask or face covering to protect their mouth and nose as the virus spreads through the air, and washing their hands with water and soap when available.

To know more about how COVID-19 is affecting young adults, please visit UNFPA’s COVID-19 Preparedness and Response.
“Boiling onions and drinking its water protects against Corona”
Woman – Age: 19-25 – Central Darfur – Zalingi – Khamsa Dagayeg Camp

Although plant-based remedies have some health benefits—such as onions which may help in protecting us against certain microbes—they cannot protect us against a COVID-19 infection. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Africa, there is currently no herbal-based traditional medicine that has been approved for the treatment or prevention of a COVID-19 infection.

Abu Algasim Adam Mohamed, Youth Leader in Khamsa Dagayeg Camp, who also works as a Security Guard at the University of Zalingei, says: “It is not true that onion water protects us against COVID-19. However, it does have nutritional value but does not offer protection from the virus or any other disease. We should seek advice from a doctor, at a nearby health clinic, or from mobile clinics in the Camp.”

We can protect ourselves by following the preventative measures set by the Ministry of Health, such as maintaining a safe distance of at least 1 meter from others, covering our mouth and nose with a face covering or mask, socializing outdoors, and getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

If you have any questions or concerns about COVID-19 and the vaccines, such as where and when to get vaccinated, please visit the nearest healthcare facility.
COVID-19 cases are being reported in Sudan and all over the globe. According to the Federal Health Promotion Directorate, COVID-19 cases are being reported in many states in Sudan. We should bear in mind that COVID-19 may impose a higher risk on people who do not have access to reliable and trustworthy information, as COVID-19 infections may lead to severe illness, hospitalization, or even death. Older people, pregnant women, and people living with chronic diseases, such as heart disease and kidney disease, are at a higher risk of becoming severely sick with the virus.

COVID-19 is real and the implications that the pandemic has imposed on people living in the country are also real. The impacts of the pandemic have resulted in children leaving their schools which made them more exposed to physical, emotional, and sexual violence.

The best way to protect ourselves against the COVID-19 virus is to practice social distancing in crowded areas, wear a face covering, wash our hands with water and soap (when available), seek vaccination, and not share misinformation as it may put our lives and our community at risk.

For more information about COVID-19 and the vaccines, please visit the World Health Organization’s webpage, call the national pandemic hotline at: 9090, or seek information from the nearest vaccination center or healthcare facility.
There's no evidence to suggest that living in villages and rural areas can prevent you from catching a COVID-19 infection. Cases of COVID-19 have been reported in all states of Sudan, such as AlGezira, Red Sea, West Darfur, East Darfur, and Central Darfur. With that in mind, living in big cities or congested areas may put you at a higher risk of contracting a COVID-19 infection because of the population density and crowded living settings.

However, living in closed settings with poor ventilation significantly increases your risk of catching an infection compared to living in open areas with good ventilation that allows air to pass through. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, being outdoors can significantly decrease your risk of catching a COVID-19 infection even if you have proper air filtration and ventilation indoors. One of the things you can do when people are visiting is to improve air ventilation by keeping the windows open to ensure proper airflow.

The COVID-19 virus does not discriminate, we are all at risk of getting infected with the virus regardless of our age, gender, ethnicity, or where we live. To protect ourselves and our communities, we should follow the preventative measures set by the World Health Organization, such as physical distancing, washing our hands regularly with water and soap (when available), and wearing a face covering when in public.

“Corona does not come to those who live in villages and rural areas, it comes to those living in advanced cities because of the presence of hospitals and labs so they are more exposed to the disease”

*Woman – Age: 26-35 – West Darfur – Jebel Moon*
COVID-19 is a respiratory disease and is primarily transmitted through the air. The World Health Organization states that the virus spreads between people when they are in close contact with an infected person, or when an infected person coughs, sneezes, sings, or breathes. COVID-19 can spread in poorly ventilated places and crowded settings. It is also transmitted to others when they touch their nose, eyes, and mouth after touching a contaminated surface or object.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is no evidence to suggest that breast milk can spread the virus to babies. Moreover, COVID-19 vaccinations are recommended for people who are trying to get pregnant, pregnant or breastfeeding. The CDC also recommends that you wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before breastfeeding or pumping breast milk, even if you are not infected with COVID-19.

The World Health Organization recommends that mothers should breastfeed their infants even if the mother is suspected to have COVID-19 or a confirmed infection. The benefit of breastfeeding outweighs the risks the COVID-19 virus may impose on the infant’s health as breastfeeding protects the baby against other infections that are life-threatening, like gastrointestinal infections and respiratory infections, according to a study published by the American National Center for Biotechnology Information.

The Canadian Blood Service states that no evidence suggests COVID-19 can be transmitted through blood transfusion. According to Dr. Steven Drews, Associate Director of Microbiology at the Canadian Blood Services, “There is absolutely no evidence of transfusion transmission for COVID-19 or any other Coronavirus”.

In addition, Dr. Yagoub Mohamed Abdelmagid, Consultant of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Fertility encourages women to take the vaccine pre-pregnancy, postpartum, and while breastfeeding. Dr. Abdelmagid adds that the vaccine can protect the mother and baby when breastfeeding as the vaccine has antibodies that protect the baby.
COVID-19 spreads during all seasons and regardless of the weather, cold, humid, hot, or rainy, as the virus can survive in different climates. Moreover, the World Health Organization states that despite the weather, our body's temperature stays in the range of 36.5 to 37 degrees Celsius. According to the World Health Organization, cases have been reported in countries all over the world, including countries with hot and cold weather conditions, such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Russia, the United States of America, and Japan.

Hence, COVID-19 can be transmitted in any climate, such as during the Summer and Winter seasons. We are all susceptible to becoming infected with the virus regardless of the type of climate we live in. The best way to protect yourself against a COVID-19 infection is to practice physical distancing in crowded settings, cover your mouth and nose with a face covering, wash your hands with water and soap (when available), and get vaccinated as it has been proven to be safe and effective in protecting against severe illness, hospitalization, and death.
"The vaccine stops the menstrual cycle"
Woman – Age: 19-25 – Al Gedaref – Al Fashaga

There is no evidence that suggests COVID-19 vaccines can stop your menstrual cycle. However, a study published by the American National Institute of Health, explains that COVID-19 vaccines can temporarily affect your menstrual cycle. Women who received one vaccination dose witnessed an increase in their menstrual cycle length by 0.71 days and 0.56 days for women vaccinated with two doses. Usually, a women’s menstrual cycle is back to normal within the next cycle.

A study led by Oregon Health and Science University Clinician-Scientist Alison Edelman, cites that minor changes have been reported to

the menstrual cycle after a COVID-19 vaccination. These changes include: "longer and shorter cycles, missed cycles, heavier and lighter menstrual flow, and intermenstrual spotting". However, these changes are temporary and do not raise concerns.

COVID-19 vaccines are important in keeping us safe against becoming severely ill or in some cases preventing COVID-related death. There are common side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine, such as fatigue and headaches, fever, pain at the injection site, and muscle pain. If your symptoms persist or if you develop severe symptoms following vaccination, you should visit the nearest healthcare facility.
COVID-19 did not end. As of 9 November 2022, 630,387,858 confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported globally. In Sudan, as of 9 November 2022, 63,558 confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection have been reported, and 4,978 deaths due to the virus.

Sheikh Mohamed Anwar Elsheikh, Media Manager for the Sammaniya Sect, says “In our religion, one of the five necessities is self-preservation”. He also adds “Our scientists have proven that the COVID-19 vaccines are available, safe, effective, and necessary in combating the disease”. Sheikh Mohamed encouraged people to take the vaccine so that we can keep ourselves, our families, and our communities safe.

According to the Sudanese Ministry of Health, COVID-19 cases are being reported all over the country in different states. Public health authorities have also stated that COVID-19 remains a health risk, especially since Sudan has not reached the WHO-recommended vaccination target, which is 70% of the population.

Public health officials are also concerned about a new variant emerging which may be more difficult to manage and impose more health risks.

Many Sudanese doctors, religious leaders, and professional football players have expressed that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective. Dr. Alsir Abu Alhassan, Consultant of Obstetrics and Gynecology, says: “Many men and women took the vaccine and gave birth to healthy babies. The vaccine is safe for the fetus, pregnant women, and lactating women and their babies”. In addition, Dr. Ahmed Farah Shadol, Secretary General of the Sudanese National Council for Medical Specialties, emphasizes: “Vaccines are safe and effective for older people and those with chronic diseases, together we can achieve public immunization”.

If you have any concerns about the vaccines, please seek advice at the nearest vaccination center, or call the pandemic hotline at: 9090.
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

WHO COVID-19 MYTHBUSTERS

DEBUNKING COVID-19 VACCINE RUMORS

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.
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