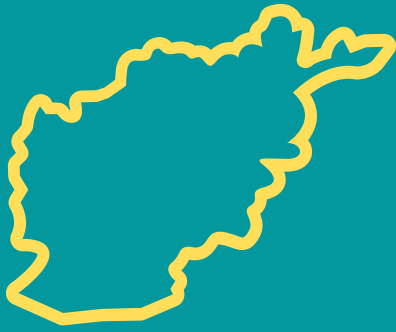


COVID-19 Vaccine Rumors

An update for Humanitarian Actors
Internews in Afghanistan - January 2023



In this publication we highlighted the analysis of rumors about side effects and harms of the COVID-19 vaccines. The rumors included in this issue are the examples of hundreds for rumors that the Internews team collected from Afghanistan's social media platforms during 2022. This issue also aims to provide useful information about vaccines to the frontline humanitarian and health workers in Afghanistan.

What do people say?

Do not vaccinate, it is dangerous, Corona is just a political game. Vaccine is 100% harmful.

Afghans should avoid getting coronavirus vaccines. Although these vaccines are free, they are not worth harming your health with.

Most of those who have been vaccinated [with COVID-19 vaccines] have got health problems such as shortness of breath, asthma, and physical weakness...

It is a full lie. Before taking COVID-19 vaccine, I did not even know what flu is, but now [after taking the vaccine], I have flu all the times.

In the area where we live, I have seen people who have been infected with the virus [COVID-19] several times after receiving the vaccine...

Currently, there is a rumor that those who take the COVID-19 vaccine will turn into zombies, and zombie disease has come to the Europe. But you are encouraging for taking vaccine?

I experienced it myself, this is not a theory, those who have been vaccinated against Corona can be found by Bluetooth scanning...

***Rumors from Afghan users on social media**

Why is this important?

Afghan social media users have continually been spreading such rumors on different social media platforms, which might have reached millions of people. The rumors can also be spread quickly within the communities, which may increase the level of mistrust on COVID-19 vaccination campaigns, and other immunization campaigns across the country. They can discourage people not to get vaccinated and may lead to an increase in the number COVID-19 cases and deaths.

What is vaccination?

Before you come into contact with deadly diseases, vaccination is a quick, safe, and effective approach to protect yourself from them. Your immune system becomes stronger because of using your body's own defense mechanisms to develop resistance to infections.

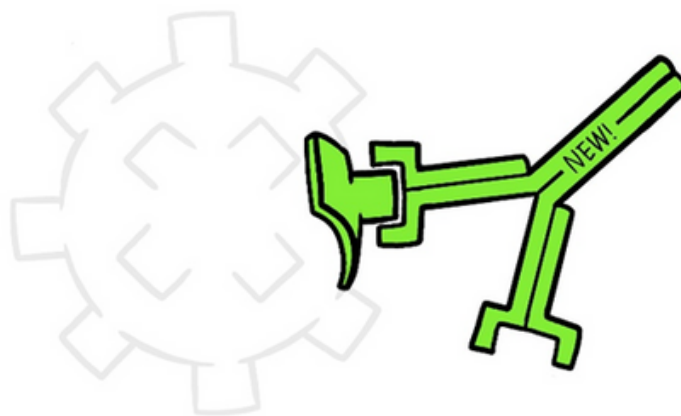
The immune system is trained to produce antibodies via vaccinations, just as it does when it is exposed to a disease. Vaccines do not, however, cause the disease or increase your risk of its complications because they only include weakened or destroyed versions of germs like bacteria or viruses. [1]

How vaccines work?

Antigens, which are specific organisms that cause an immune response in the body, are contained in vaccines as weak or inactive components. Instead of the antigen itself, more recent vaccinations include the recipe for making antigens. Whether the vaccine contains the antigen itself or the instructions for the body to create it, this weaker form won't actually cause disease in the recipient; instead, it will stimulate their immune system to react much as it would have during its initial response to the pathogen.

VACCINE

NEW ANTIBODY



A **VACCINE** is a tiny weakened non-dangerous fragment of the organism and includes parts of the antigen. It's enough that our body can learn to build the specific antibody. Then if the body encounters the real antigen later, as part of the real organism, it already knows how to defeat it.

Several doses of some vaccinations must be administered spaced weeks or months apart. It may be necessary for the establishment of memory cells and the creation of long-lasting antibodies. In this approach, the body develops the skills necessary to combat a particular disease-causing organism, imprinting those skills in its memory so that it can quickly respond to future exposure.

Vaccinating not only protects individuals, but it also protects people in communities who cannot get vaccinated due to underlying health conditions that weaken their immune systems. To protect the communities everyone who can vaccinate are encouraged to get vaccinated. [2]



Community vaccination protects the whole community, even those who can't vaccinate.

COVID-19 vaccine safety

The COVID-19 vaccinations, like all other vaccines, go through a rigorous, multi-stage testing procedure that includes significant clinical studies with tens of thousands of participants. These tests have been specifically created to find any safety issues.

The effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccinations has been studied in sizable, randomized controlled trials with a diverse population, including individuals from all ages, sexes, and ethnic backgrounds as well as those with known medical issues. Across all demographics, vaccinations have demonstrated a high level of efficacy. In patients with a variety of underlying medical conditions that are linked to a higher risk of developing serious illnesses, vaccinations have been demonstrated to be both safe and beneficial. These include stable and well-controlled chronic infections, high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, lung, liver, and kidney illness. [3]

People with weakened immune systems, elderly individuals with extreme frailty, those with a history of severe vaccine allergies, those with HIV, pregnant women, and those who are nursing infants should all speak with a doctor before receiving any vaccinations.[4]

COVID-19 vaccine side effects

Vaccines are made to provide immunity without the risks associated with contracting the disease. When getting shots, it's normal to suffer some mild-to-moderate adverse effects. This is due to the fact that your immune system is telling your body how to respond: it raises your body temperature to kill the virus and increases blood flow to allow for the circulation of more immune cells.

The body's immune system is responding to the vaccination, specifically the antigen (a chemical that prompts an immunological reaction), and is preparing to combat the virus, thus side effects like a low-grade temperature or muscular aches are typical and not alarming. After a few days, these adverse effects typically go away on their own.

Common, mild, or moderate side effects are advantageous since they demonstrate the effectiveness of the vaccination. Even if there are no side effects, the vaccine may still be beneficial. It implies that each person reacts differently. Pain at the injection site, fever, exhaustion, headache, muscle pain, chills, and diarrhea are typical side effects. Post-vaccination side effects are different depending on the vaccine. [5]



What can we do as humanitarian actors?

- In order to increase public awareness about COVID-19 vaccines and health concerns, humanitarian and health actors can establish strong relationships with local media and journalists and help them provide correct and up to date information to the people.
- Humanitarian organizations can create specific communication channels to engage journalists, influential people, community and religious leaders with the facts and healthy information about COVID-19 and other health issues.
- Humanitarian actors can monitor social media platforms and get engaged and respond rumors and misinformation directly. They can also address the rumors by actively sharing the facts about COVID-19 vaccines into their social media platforms.
- The actors can host events and seminars about COVID-19 and other outbreaks in the country and invite media and journalists to cover the events and produce reports based on facts and correct information.
- Humanitarian organizations can work with Mullahs to include the facts and information in their Jumma prayer speeches. This could be very helpful as people often in Afghan communities believe in what they hear from religious scholars.
- What is new or different that we can do given the rumors are still circulating and we are heading into winter.
- Do we need more specific risk communications about respiratory infections and covid?

Resources you can use to guide your communications on COVID-19 vaccines



- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/safety-of-vaccines.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/effectiveness/why-measure-effectiveness/breakthrough-cases.html>
- <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/side-effects-of-covid-19-vaccines>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/coronavirus-vaccine/art-20484859>

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).

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, Project Manager Afghanistan, Internews - msadat@internews.org.



Sources:

[1] [What is vaccination?](#)

[2] [How do vaccines work?](#)

[3] and [4] [Safety of COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

[5] [Side Effects of COVID-19 Vaccines](#)