The Sudan Rooted in Trust Project (RiT) aims to address rumors, perceptions, and misinformation about COVID-19 and other health issues by collecting and analyzing rumors found on Sudanese social media, and through face-to-face listening groups. This regular collection of community insights aims to address questions and common misperceptions found across Sudan. It is meant to help volunteers and field staff provide trustworthy information, and resources to help respond to their communities’ concerns and information needs about COVID-19 and the vaccines, and other health issues.

This community bulletin is based on an analysis of 722 rumors collected in Arabic, between 23 January and 2 March 2023, from Facebook and Twitter, and through face-to-face listening groups with communities affected by conflict and displacement in Al-Gedaref, Red Sea, Central Darfur, North Darfur, West Darfur, South Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile States.
This is the thematic breakdown of 722 rumors collected in Arabic between 23 January and 2 March 2023, from Facebook, Twitter, and through listening groups with communities affected by conflict and displacement in Al-Gedaref, Red Sea, Central Darfur, North Darfur, South Darfur, West Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile States.

626 RUMORS WERE COLLECTED DURING LISTENING GROUPS FROM PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

96 RUMORS WERE COLLECTED FROM SUDANESE SOCIAL MEDIA SPACES

63% of rumors about COVID-19 and vaccines have been shared by women on social media and during listening groups.
This is an analysis of emotions expressed in 722 rumors in Arabic between 23 January and 2 March 2023. Internews found that 33% of the rumors expressed feelings of fear, which was mostly connected to the safety and side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine. Rumors expressing apathy were mainly discussing the use of herbal and home made remedies as a cure for COVID-19.

COVID-19 and Vaccine Rumors Based on Risk Level

This is a breakdown of 97 rumors collected during listening group sessions held in IDP camps in Arabic between 23 January and 2 March 2023. Internews found that 43% of the rumor data was collected from Abu-Shouk Camp in North Darfur.

Sudan COVID-19 Statistics

As of 7 March 2023, the official COVID-19 statistics rose to 63,829 confirmed cases and 5,017 COVID-19 deaths.

As of 4 March 2023, a total of 12,628,561 persons were vaccinated with at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in all states of Sudan, while 10,576,238 people have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, which is over 20 percent of Sudan’s population.
RUMOR #1

“...Treat the Jaundice myth they don’t take quinine for it there is this understanding that I came across with a severe Malaria patient.”

Woman – Age Unknown – Facebook

Dr Musab Elnegoumi, Medical Microbiologist and Public Health Professional at the Diseases Control Directorate at the Ministry of Health and National Tuberculosis Control Program, clarifies: “Jaundice does not mean that the patient has malaria. Quinine is available over the counter at pharmacies in Sudan as a treatment for malaria. The toleration and misuse of quinine in such cases of unconfirmed malaria would exacerbate the antimalarial resistance for quinine, similar to antibacterial resistance caused by the misuse of antibiotics.”

Jaundice is a medical condition which can result in the white of our eyes or skin turning yellow. It can happen due to several reasons including gallstones, liver-disease, pancreatitis, hepatitis, sickle cell disease or, according to CDC, severe malaria.

Since the 17th century, Quinine has played an important role in treating malaria. Yet, with time its effectiveness proved limited to treating uncomplicated malaria and Chloroquine-resistant malaria. A problem arises with the use of quinine and other medications in treating malaria, which is resistance to antimalarial medicines. In its guidelines for the treatment of malaria, the WHO noted that “resistance to almost all antimalarials [including quinine] has been documented.” Since 2006, the WHO recommends quinine to be used as second-line malaria treatment due to its complex treatment regime and side-effects.

In 2011, a study exploring the historical role of quinine as an anti-malarial drug, noted: “For uncomplicated malaria, artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT) offers a better option than quinine,” given the simplicity of dosing and shorter treatment duration. The study concludes that: “in the near future, quinine will continue to play a significant role in the management of malaria, particularly in resource limited settings.” which are cases of stock shortages in artemisinin and its derivatives.

Hence, Jaundice alone is not a sign of malaria and quinine should not be tolerated as a treatment for it, unless malaria is confirmed by microscopy. Quinine should be reserved for its justified effective purpose: a second-line treatment for malaria (only deemed proper by physicians avoiding its adverse risks), given the shortages in artemisinin and its derivatives and growing antimalarial drug resistance.
COVID-19 does not stop breast milk. Dr Tasneem Tajelsir, former COVAX National Consultant for Adverse Events Following Immunization at the Ministry of Health, stresses: “The vaccine does not affect women’s ability to make milk. Antibodies in the breast milk after COVID-19 vaccination do not cause any harm to the baby.” UNICEF also confirms: “It is highly unlikely that vaccination will have any impact on women’s ability to make milk”. Lactating women can and should continue to breastfeed or pump milk after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, as the vaccination will not have an impact on their milk production. Getting vaccinated should not prevent or interrupt breastfeeding.

In a study looking at how COVID-19 vaccines can affect breastmilk production in lactating women, researchers analyzed five studies with a total of 11,586 female participants who received the COVID-19 vaccine. The research found that some women reported a temporary decrease in milk production after getting vaccinated, it returned to normal within three days in all of the cases. Some women also reported an increase in milk production after getting the vaccine. In conclusion, the studies suggest that getting a COVID-19 vaccine does not have a significant impact on breast milk production.

Dr Yagoub Mohamed Abdelmagid, Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Fertility Consultant, recommends women during pregnancy, post-pregnancy, postpartum, and lactating women to take the COVID-19 vaccine because it protects the mother and baby during pregnancy and during the breastfeeding period. The vaccine contains antibodies that can protect the mother and child.

If you are currently breastfeeding and have questions about the vaccine, please call the national health hotline at 9090, to speak to a healthcare worker.
The American Cancer Society states that people with cancer should get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible, unless their doctor advises against it due to specific medical reasons. The COVID-19 vaccines are safe for cancer patients, and they are recommended by the American Society of Clinical Oncology. Cancer patients may experience side effects from the vaccine, but these side effects are generally mild.

Dr Abeer Omar Al-Zubair, Sudanese Oncologist, says people suffering from cancer are encouraged to get vaccinated against COVID-19. She adds that they should be isolated from anyone who is suspected of having a COVID-19 infection, as immunity is especially weakened for those undergoing chemotherapy treatment.

Getting vaccinated can help protect cancer patients from getting seriously ill from COVID-19. People who have cancer are at a higher risk of developing severe illness from COVID-19 infections. This is because cancer and cancer treatments can weaken the immune system, making it harder for the body to fight off infections. Additionally, cancer patients may have other health conditions which can also increase their risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

According to Cleveland Clinic, “The short answer is that for most adults with cancer or a history of cancer, vaccination against COVID-19 is recommended, but there are factors for people with cancer to consider first”. Cleveland Clinic recommends people undergoing cancer treatment to consult with their doctor before getting vaccinated, as the doctor will take into consideration other factors such as the type of cancer and treatment being given to the patient to determine the suitability of the vaccine.

Overall, cancer patients should take extra precautions to protect themselves from COVID-19, such as following the Ministry of Health COVID-19 recommendations, like avoiding crowds and larger social gatherings, wearing a face mask or face covering, and getting vaccinated against COVID-19.
There are several common side effects following COVID-19 vaccination that are usually mild and temporary for adults (18 years and older), including: tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, nausea, and fever. However, experiencing fever for an entire year, is not one of the common or documented side effects of the vaccine, according to CDC.

Persistent, low-grade fever may occur due to many reasons, such as infections in general (i.e. respiratory infections, or urinary tract infections), or conditions like stress, cancer, chronic disorders, or even some medications. Diagnosis of the potential cause/s of persistent low-grade fever is important to eliminate the persistent condition.

According to the US’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Any vaccine can cause side effects. For the most part these are minor (for example, a sore arm or low-grade fever) and go away within a few days”. The US-based Mayo Clinic explains: “Most side effects go away in a few days. Side effects after the second dose might be more intense. Many people have no side effects. Side effects of booster shots appear to be similar to side effects experienced after the two-dose or single-dose primary shots.”

In extremely rare cases, some people have complained of adverse events following COVID-19 vaccinations. Adverse events are serious health complications or problems following vaccination, which may or may not be because of the vaccine. Adverse events are rare and can be coincidental and may have nothing to do with the COVID-19 vaccine.

If you or your loved one experience side effects following vaccination that last more than a few days, please call the Ministry of Health’s pandemic hotline at 9090. If you experience severe illness, or prolonged illness after getting vaccinated, please visit your doctor or the nearest health facility.
To date, there are no approved treatments for COVID-19 available in Sudan. There is no scientific evidence that the Kardala roots, Altako tree, or Rawamed tree can prevent or cure COVID-19 infections. In Azum, Central Darfur, camels are fed the leaves of the Rawamed tree. Although this tree may have nutritional benefits for camels, there is no scientific proof that it has any effect in preventing or treating COVID-19 in humans.

The use of unproven herbal remedies can prevent or discourage people from seeking proper medical care leading to more severe illness or complications. The best way to protect ourselves against the virus is by following the preventative measures set by the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health, such as washing our hands with water and soap (when available), wearing a face mask or face covering, and practicing physical distancing in public and crowded places. The health authorities also recommend we get vaccinated against COVID-19, which is considered the best protection from the virus and is safe and effective in preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19 infection.
COVID-19 vaccines are not a cure or a treatment for the loss of smell or taste, but it can help in reducing the risk of getting sick, experiencing severe illness, or even dying from COVID-19 in the future. Additionally, vaccines can help in slowing down the spread of the virus, decreasing the number of cases, and ending the pandemic.

Some people can experience long term COVID-19 symptoms that can last up to weeks, months, or even years. This is known as long COVID. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, long COVID can include several symptoms such as change in smell or taste, fatigue, cough, and difficulty concentrating. If you experience long-lasting COVID-19 symptoms, please talk to a doctor.

COVID-19 can affect our sense of smell and taste. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, loss of smell and taste is a common symptom of COVID-19. In an interview with Pharmacy Times, Kai Zhao, Director of Nasal Physiology and Therapeutic Center in the Department of Otolaryngology at Ohio State University College of Medicine, confirms that the persistence of loss of smell and taste are COVID-19 symptoms. Zhao and his team found that even fully vaccinated patients, infected with the Delta variant, can experience significant smell and taste loss, and this symptom often comes with other mild symptoms.

According to a study that examined individuals who contracted COVID-19 that already took the COVID-19 vaccine, some people had problems with their sense of taste and smell such as olfactory dysfunction (not being able to smell things properly or at all) and gustatory dysfunction (not being able to taste things properly or at all), along with other symptoms like fatigue, headache, and runny nose. The study suggests that loss of smell and taste could still be one of the symptoms of COVID-19 even in vaccinated people, it also suggested that more research is needed to understand how well people who took the vaccine recover from the virus.
According to Mayo Clinic COVID-19 vaccines can cause mild side effects like pain, swelling, fever, fatigue, headache, diarrhea, muscle and joint pain, chills, nausea, vomiting, and swollen lymph nodes. Most side effects go away within a few days, however, some people experienced more intense side effects after the second dose.

The World Health Organization states that vaccines are created to provide immunity without the risk of contracting the disease. It is common to experience mild to moderate side effects when receiving COVID-19 vaccines. These mild to moderate side effects, such as muscle aches and fever, are common and not a reason to worry since they’re an indication that the vaccine is working. These side effects typically go away in a few days.

If you took the COVID-19 vaccine and are experiencing long-lasting side effects that won’t go away, you can contact your doctor or visit the nearest health facility. You can also report your side effects to the Ministry of Health, by calling the national 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.

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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