INTRODUCTION TO ROOTED IN TRUST

Rooted in Trust (RiT) is a USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA)-funded project run by Internews to support humanitarian and public health agencies understand and manage the spread of rumors and misinformation about COVID-19 and recently expanded to cover other health topics, as well as food security. [1] Our work focuses on strengthening the information ecosystem by ensuring that communities have access to reliable, actionable, and contextual information that responds to their concerns and information needs. The project was recently re-launched in September 2021 with its second chapter (RiT2.0) expected to run until June 2023.

In this bulletin, Internews profiles commonly occurring rumors across social media sites and offline through our partner’s on-ground social listening activities in Lebanon between 1 and 30 April 2023. Our partner Akkarouna are active in engaging both the Syrian & Lebanese communities in the North of Lebanon region, and our Social Media Monitoring team engages with different communities of all nationalities living in all regions of Lebanon.

During this period, 100 online rumors were collected from Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram, in addition to private groups and accounts that have a relatively high user engagement. An additional 53 offline rumors were collected through social listening activities conducted by our partners, with the goal of reaching populations and groups that are less active online and exposed to rumors through word of mouth.

Four rumors were subsequently selected for this bulletin which fall under the recurring themes of “Origin/Cause of COVID-19”, “Communicable Disease”, “Child Health”.

HEALTH OVERVIEW IN THE COUNTRY

- For the fourth consecutive month, Cholera remains at 0 new cases as of the 29th of April. [2] However, these figures may be underreported and there were 371 suspected cases during April, [3] which is why it is crucial to continue messaging on the importance of taking the Oral Cholera Vaccine (OCV), especially within communities in the North where outbreaks are likely to re-occur.

- While the prevalence of influenza was low according to the latest figure from the first week of April, [4] it is still necessary to practice preventive methods in order to protect yourself and the community. Lebanon’s positivity rate was at 4% at the end of February [5] and has decreased since then. Out of 99 reported outpatients with Influenza/COVID-19 like illness, only 1% was confirmed to be a positive case of influenza. [6]

- Similar to the previous month, the number of COVID-19 cases in Lebanon remains high and the country is still classified at Level 3 of community transmission. Throughout the period of the 1st to 30th of April, a total of 1,750 new COVID-19 cases and 30 new COVID-19 deaths were reported in Lebanon. [7] The data indicates a slight decrease in new cases and the number of deaths in comparison to March’s numbers, which were 2,890 and 42 respectively. [8]

- The overall COVID-19 vaccine coverage in the country is 44.4% of people who received two doses, [9] which is still considered very low compared to the target to reach community immunity: having at least 85% of the target population receiving 2 doses. Drivers behind low vaccination rates include vaccine misinformation and logistical challenges. [10]

VACCINE ROLL-OUT

People of all nationalities living in Lebanon can get vaccinated, including Syrians, Palestinians, and migrant workers, even if their residency documents are not up to date, and no prior registration is needed to receive the vaccine:

List of vaccination centers: https://cdn.me-qr.com/pdf/7695678.pdf

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Dose</th>
<th>Everyone over the age of five years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd Dose</td>
<td>Available to all those who have received the vaccine 3 weeks or more prior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Dose</td>
<td>Available to all those who have received the second dose five months ago or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Dose</td>
<td>Available to all, six months after receiving the third dose</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Those with moderate to severe COVID-19 illness who are hospitalized experience the highest rate of clotting, especially those who require supporting oxygen or ventilation or who are in the intensive care unit. [14] It should be noted here that the oxygen support and ventilation are not the cause of blood clotting, it is usually patients who reach this stage of infection who are more prone to experience, in addition to respiratory issues, blood clots.

Although some initial research data encourages the use of aspirin in treating COVID-19, the evidence in favor of its usage is still weak and inconclusive. [15] While aspirin cannot treat many of the severe COVID symptoms, it does appear to be helpful in the treatment of seriously unwell patients, [16] but more studies need to be conducted to confirm that. [17]

The chief officer of the Cleveland Clinic’s Heart and Vascular Institute warns about taking aspirin to treat COVID-19 without consulting with a doctor first. [16] Daily aspirin use may result in significant adverse effects, such as gastrointestinal and brain bleeding. [19]

Don’t panic! If you’re being treated for COVID-19, ask your doctor about the risks of blood clots in your case and let the expert decide if any treatment is needed and which strategy to follow depending on the risk. [20]

Do not take any aspirin without consulting with your doctor first as it can have adverse and dangerous effects. For example, if you are pregnant or have high blood pressure, bleeding disorders, asthma, or liver and kidney disease, aspirin could worsen your condition. [21]

Monitor yourself for any symptoms of blood clots, heart attacks, or strokes. Face drooping, weakness in one arm or leg, speaking difficulties, recent swelling, soreness, pain, or discoloration in the arms or legs, unexpected shortness of breath, and chest pain or pain radiating to the neck, arms, jaw, or back are a few of these symptoms. [22]

Follow simple steps that can contribute to preventing blood clots such as getting up and moving around every two hours, as well as drinking a lot of fluids to stay hydrated. [23]

Get vaccinated! If you’re unvaccinated the risk of blood clots during a COVID-19 infection is way higher than the risk from vaccines, and the vaccine protects you from severe symptoms. [24]
While this rumor can be associated to the spread of diseases such as Cholera with Syrian refugees, people often do not know the actual history of Syria with the disease. For example, Syria has a long history with Cholera that outdates by far the displacement of Syrian refugees to Lebanon. Outbreaks have been officially documented for a very long time and dating all the way back to 1848 when the country was still ruled by the Ottoman Empire. [25] Cholera outbreaks then re-occurred in the years 1865, 1875, 1891, 1903, and throughout the twentieth century [26] meaning that Cholera is not new to Syrians.

The most common communicable diseases in Lebanon in the last decade such as Tuberculosis, Measles, Mumps, Leishmaniasis, and Hepatitis A have all been recorded in Lebanon prior to the beginning of the influx of Syrian refugees in 2011. [27]

For example, the reappearance of Measles in Lebanon in the 2013 outbreak really just coincided with the influx of Syrian refugees. Behind this coincidence was the root cause of the Measles outbreak was the low vaccination rates among the Lebanese population. [28]

Syrian refugees in Lebanon often live in unsanitary and crowded conditions which can lead to the spread of respiratory, skin, and gastrointestinal infections. [29] Studies show that in the short term, prior to resettlement, displaced populations frequently experience unhealthy living conditions, insufficient housing, overcrowding, and inadequate nourishment. [30] These elements are all associated with a higher risk of contracting infectious diseases. [31]

Learn about any disease before you spread information about it: Knowing essential facts can be beneficial for your health and the health of your community. To know more about symptoms, prevention, and treatment methods of different diseases either ask your trusted physician or visit the website of UN agencies. For example, here are the UNICEF Cholera pages: [For English - For Arabic]

Pointing fingers will not protect you, but preventive practices will! Follow good hygiene practices in your daily life which include:
- Regularly washing your hands
- Drink clean water. If unsure, boil the water before consuming it
- Disinfecting surfaces at home and devices that are commonly used such as laptops, cellphones, tabs etc.

Follow food security tips throughout the displacement journey and once settled. This includes:
- Thoroughly cook meats, eggs, and other foods. Avoid eating raw meat.
- Maintaining good hygiene while handling food
- Checking the expiry date of perishable food items before consumption and ensuring food is properly stored to avoid contamination and spoilage.
- Store food in clean and covered containers to avoid contamination by insects or rodents

Make sure you and your loved ones (especially kids) are vaccinated against the main communicable diseases. According to the World Health Organization, diseases can’t disappear without vaccines and if we stop getting vaccinated these diseases would come back. [33]

In the case of a suspected case of Cholera, one of the most recent communicable diseases that reappeared, seek immediate healthcare: if left untreated, the disease can be deadly within just hours of infection as it can cause severe dehydration. Cholera testing is free. You can call one of the hotlines for Cholera:
- 1760 – Red Cross / 1787 – MoPH / 01 832 700 – Hospital Admission
Marburg disease is a rare but severe viral disease that belongs to the Filoviridae family, the same family that includes Ebola virus. It was first identified in 1967 during simultaneous outbreaks in Marburg, Germany, and Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

The virus is transmitted to humans through direct contact with the bodily fluids of infected animals, such as bats, or through close contact with an infected person.

Symptoms of Marburg disease include fever, headache, muscle pain, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, and bleeding from various parts of the body.

In 2023, a Marburg virus disease outbreak was declared in both Equatorial Guinea and Tanzania in February and March respectively. There have been no reports of further outbreaks outside these countries so far.

In 2022, a Marburg virus disease outbreak was declared in Ghana on July 7th only to be declared over on September 16th thanks to the efficient response of the Ministry of Health and the Ghana Health Service with support from WHO and other partners.

Lebanon and its neighboring countries have no history of the Marburg disease.

Fact Checking

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Recommendations

What should I do if there was a Marburg outbreak?

- Keep up with updates about outbreaks of the Marburg virus to see in which countries they are reported in. This can be done by following the updates on the website of the Center for Disease Control here: Marburg Virus Disease Outbreaks | Marburg (Marburg Virus Disease) | CDC

- Make sure to get information about health risks and outbreaks from credible and specialized sources of information rather than random social media posts. If something about an outbreak is shared online, make sure to fact check it by visiting the website of the World Health Organization. Link for the Arabic website is here: منتشرات الإخبارية منظمة الصحة العالمية (who.int)

- Hygiene, hygiene, and more hygiene! While Marburg is not spreading in Lebanon, it’s always safer to adopt good hygiene practices to protect yourself and your loved ones from a big number of viruses and diseases that you might be at risk of contracting. These practices are detailed in the recommendations section of rumor 2 of this bulletin.

Rumor #3

“Communicable Disease”
Mumps is a viral disease caused by the mumps virus that is easily spread through respiratory droplets or contact or saliva. The most common symptoms of mumps are fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness, loss of appetite, and swollen and tender salivary glands under the ears or jaw. This is what causes the puffy cheeks and a tender, swollen jaw. 

National mumps incidents dropped over the previous ten years from 5 per 100,000 suspected cases in 2007 to less than 1 per 100,000 in 2010 and up to 2013. In 2014, Lebanon saw a widespread outbreak that had a similar impact on both the native population and Syrian refugees. Mumps incidence in the Lebanese population was 12.74 per 100,000 in 2014, and it rose to 23.3 per 100,000 in 2015.

In the last decade, the outbreaks of mumps in Lebanon were recorded among adolescents. During the 2014 outbreak, around 83% of cases reported were aged between 1 and 19 years.

The goal of mumps treatment is to reduce symptoms while your body’s immune system battles the infection. The mumps virus cannot currently be treated with medication. Usually, the illness disappears after a week or two. 

While there is no treatment, scratching is NOT listed as a way to relieve the symptoms of mumps.

Make sure your child receives the combined MMR vaccine for mumps, measles, and rubella to keep them from contracting the disease. After receiving two doses according to the appropriate timing, the vaccine offers about 88% protection against mumps. If you didn’t have the vaccine as a child, you can still receive it as an adult!

If you suspect you or your child have the mumps, it’s crucial to visit a doctor for a diagnosis. Prior to visiting the medical center, let your doctor know so that any required measures can be taken to stop the spread of infection.

If you or your child have the mumps, you can also do the following to relieve the symptoms:
- Use a warm or cool compress on your swollen glands to help with any pain
- Eat foods that don’t require much chewing, like soup, mashed potatoes, and scrambled eggs
- Get plenty of bed rest until your symptoms subside
- Drink plenty of fluids. Avoid acidic drinks like fruit juice as these can be irritating

Don’t send your child who has the mumps to school or childcare for at least 5 days because the child might be contagious during that period. This would prevent an outbreak of the mumps at school and in the community.
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