LEBANON SITUATION REPORT
A MONTHLY SITUATION REPORT AIMED AT TACKLING COVID-19 RUMORS TO DEBUNK THE “INFODEMIC”

MAY 2023 - #14

INTRODUCTION
In May, there were a total of 800 new COVID-19 cases as reported by the WHO. A significant decrease from the 2099 cases in April 2023. Lebanon, like many other countries, has been grappling with the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, despite the ongoing presence of the virus and daily confirmed cases, the attention of the Lebanese population has begun to shift towards other pressing concerns. The data collection in May sheds the light on the evolving landscape of public discourse within the country. This shift is evident in the topics that captured public attention, with a notable transition from COVID-19-related rumors to discussions centered around other health topics and food security.

HOW WE DO IT
We identify and analyze rumors to help humanitarian actors and health workers better inform their Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) strategies.

SITUATION BY THE NUMBERS (WHO)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Covid-19 cases reported (During May 2023)</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of deaths (During May 2023)</td>
<td>10,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of deaths (During May 2023)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latest reported cases per day (During May 2023)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccine doses administered (As of 21 December 2022)</td>
<td>5,814,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinated with at least one dose (As of 21 December 2022)</td>
<td>2,740,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons fully vaccinated (As of 21 December 2022)</td>
<td>2,414,223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ABOUT ROOTED IN TRUST
Rooted in Trust is collecting, analyzing, and responding to rumors in 13 countries with generous support from USAID’s Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA). We focus on equipping journalists and humanitarian communicators with the tools they need in the languages they prefer, to combat rumors and misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic.
In May, a total of 233 rumors were collected, consisting of 190 online rumors and 43 offline rumors. Online rumors accounted for approximately 81.5% of the total rumors, while offline rumors made up the remaining 18.5%. Among the online platforms, WhatsApp had the highest share of rumors, representing approximately 46.7% of the online rumors, followed by Twitter (13.7%), Facebook (14.2%), Instagram (8.4%), YouTube (7.4%), Telegram (5.3%), and TikTok (4.7%).

Analyzing the themes of the rumors, the top-trending category was "Other Health Topic," accounting for approximately 66.9% of the total rumors collected. The second most prominent theme was "Food Security" with approximately 17.2% of the rumors, followed by "COVID-19 General" (6.4%), "COVID-19 Vaccine" (7.7%), and "Other Non-Health Non-COVID-19" (1.7%).

Regarding the sources of the online rumors, Ordinary People contributed approximately 57.9% of the online rumors, followed by Influencers with 38.4%, and supposed Healthcare Professionals with 3.7%. This distribution has remained relatively consistent since the beginning of 2023, reflecting the prominence of rumors originating from the general public and influential individuals.

The Online sub-themes with the highest number of rumors collected were “Communicable diseases” (22 rumors) and “Chronic Diseases” (20), both of which were found under the theme of “Other Health Topic”. The former set of rumors encompasses a diverse range of subjects and cannot be grouped under one specific category. These rumors cover various topics, including the potential health benefits of moringa, the threat of measles in specific regions of Lebanon, the spread of an unknown virus causing gastrointestinal symptoms in children, the need to soak vegetables in bleach before consumption, the spread of smallpox in northern Lebanon, advancements in cancer treatment, concerns about the spread of communicable diseases in nurseries and schools, the association between caffeine and body fat, the market for cancer and chronic disease medicines, and the impact of obesity on cancer risk.

For the theme of “Food Security”, the most prevalent sub-theme continues to be “Individual Access / Affordability” (9 rumors). In this context, there have been rumors circulating about the escalating prices of sugar, meat, and rice.

In the region of Ilit and Abou Samra in Akkar and North Lebanon, 43 offline rumors were collected through focus groups. Among these rumors, COVID-19 General and COVID-19 Vaccine each accounted for approximately 18.6% of the total focus group discussions. Other Health Topics comprised approximately 60.5% of the rumors, while Other Non-Health Non-COVID-19 constituted approximately 2.3% of the total. Digging deeper into the Other Health Topic category, the specific subthemes discussed included Access to Healthcare (2 rumors), Child Health (3 rumors), Chronic Diseases (1 rumor), Communicable Diseases (2 rumors), Malnutrition (2 rumors), Mental Health (1 rumor), and Other (2 rumors). We see general reduction in the number of COVID rumors with, Within the COVID-19 General topic, the subthemes discussed in the focus groups included Hoax (1 rumor), Origin/Cause (3 rumors), Other (1 rumor), Secondary Impacts (1 rumor), and Treatment/Cure (1 rumor).
**THEMES AND SUBTHEMES**

### Theme: COVID-19 General

**Subtheme:**
- Disease Severity
- Secondary Impacts
- Hoax
- Origin/Cause
- Secondary Impacts
- Treatment/Cure
- Other

### Theme: COVID-19 Vaccine

**Subtheme:**
- Corruption
- Death
- Pregnancy/Fertility
- Safety/Side Effects
- Vaccine Agenda
- Product Development/Manufacturing
- Safety/Side Effects
Theme: Other Health Topic
Subtheme:

- Access to healthcare
- Availability of healthcare
- Child health
- Chronic diseases
- Communicable disease
- Emergency preparedness
- Healthcare workers
- Hygiene
- Malnutrition
- Mental health
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Vaccination programs
- Other

RISK LEVELS

- Low Risk: 155
- Medium Risk: 68
- High Risk: 10

CHANNELS

- Focus Groups
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Telegram
- Tiktok
- Twitter
- WhatsApp
- Youtube

0 25 50 75 100
The shift of rumors from COVID-19 to other health topics and food security in Lebanon can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the ongoing socio-economic crisis in the country has deepened, leaving many people struggling to meet their basic needs. With the deteriorating economic situation, individuals are increasingly concerned about their access to healthcare services, availability of medicine, and the rising prices of essential food items. These pressing issues have captured public attention and led to a shift in the focus of rumors towards health-related topics and food security.

Furthermore, the challenges faced by the healthcare system in Lebanon, including limited resources, shortages of medication, and overwhelmed hospitals, have hindered the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the public’s attention has shifted towards other health issues that may directly impact their lives and well-being. People are seeking information and sharing rumors related to various health concerns, including cancer, chronic diseases, communicable diseases, and mental health, as they grapple with the difficulties of accessing adequate healthcare in a strained system.

Food security has also emerged as a prominent topic of concern. The high inflation rates, economic instability, and scarcity of resources have led to increased food prices, making it challenging for many individuals and families to afford nutritious meals. Rumors regarding the availability, affordability, and quality of food have become prevalent, reflecting the growing anxieties and struggles faced by the population.

In terms of COVID-19 statistics, the month of May witnessed a significant decrease in reported cases and deaths compared to the previous month. Only 800 cases and 13 deaths were reported in May, a considerable decline from the 2,099 cases and 37 deaths recorded in April. This decline in COVID-19 figures may have contributed to the shift in rumors away from the pandemic towards other health topics and food security. As the immediate threat of the virus appeared to lessen during this period, people’s attention and concerns shifted towards the broader health challenges and socio-economic repercussions faced by the Lebanese population. However, it is essential to remain vigilant and continue adhering to preventive measures to ensure the continued containment of the virus and the overall well-being of the community.

**CONTACT**

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For more information on the project, visit  
- https://rootedintrust.org/countries/lebanon/