LEBANON SITUATION REPORT
A monthly situation report aimed at tackling COVID-19 rumors to debunk the "infodemic"

July 2022 | #5

Situation by the Numbers (WHO)
- Covid-19 cases reported during July 2022: 26,954
- Total number of deaths: 10,532
- Latest reported cases per day: 711
- Number of Quarantined: 26,800
- Vaccine doses during July: 51,076
  - First dose: 10,154
  - Second dose: 7,650
  - Third dose: 22,128
  - Fourth dose: 21,001

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.

Introduction
According to WHO, Lebanon is now at Level 2 of community transmission. Meanwhile, the general public’s concerns continue to be drawn away from the COVID-19 situation due to the ongoing economic crisis. The first half of the month saw tensions surrounding the disputed maritime border zone with Israel. This was then followed by a Hepatitis A outbreak in Tripoli and a high number of food poisoning cases reported in the Bekaa region. High vigilance continues to be recommended with a focus on social distancing measures and increased vaccine coverage, particularly among already vulnerable population groups as well as children. Fourth doses are now available, and the MoPH is also encouraging that children receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

About RiT
Rooted in Trust is collecting, analyzing and responding to rumors in 10 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 the month of July 2022, misinformation continued to spread through social media platforms in Lebanon with 104 online rumors collected by Social Media Monitors. As previously noted, rumors continue to revolve around the top sub-theme of “Long-COVID”, but with a new trend focusing on perceived long-term mental health effects such as developing depression, hallucinations, or psychosis. All “Long-COVID” sub-theme rumors contain notions of either fear (58%) or confusion (42%).

The Rooted in Trust 2.0 methodology of incorporating the theme “Other Health Topics” significantly expanded in July, allowing for the collection of 35 online rumors, comprising over one-third of the total online rumors collected. Some online rumors made reference to headless sea creatures invading the coast, eating trash, and causing death. However, the majority of the other-health related rumors revolve around the sub-theme of “Communicable diseases” and were found on either Twitter or Facebook.

More than half rumors from the sub-theme of “Communicable disease” make a direct reference to Monkeypox and the LGBTQI+ community as being interlinked. The only high-risk rumor observed stems from a so-called “Health Professional” who engages in LGBTQI+ hate speech, claiming that being gay is an abnormality and that they are to blame for the spread of viruses and diseases, including Monkeypox.

In July, a total of 56 offline rumors were collected in the Bekaa region through community meetings (84%) and focus group discussions (16%). Notably, vaccine-related offline rumors continue to be trending as observed in previous months, with mentions of the vaccine causing death two years after infection and the vaccine causing miscarriages. Some rumors also focus on possible COVID-19 treatments such as eating herbs, flowers, lemons, and oranges, as well as gargling salt water. More than one-third of the offline rumors focused on “Other Health Topics”, with all of them making reference to Monkeypox and Hepatitis A causing death. Many rumors also conflate Monkeypox, Smallpox, and Influenza symptoms.
KEY THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Total Number of Rumors Online for June 2022: 104

KEY THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

- Government
- Hoax
- Long-COVID
- Masks
- Origin/Cause
- Prevention
- Reinfection
- Symptoms
- Testing
- Transmission
- Treatment/Cure
- Variants
- Death
- Doses
- Efficacy
- Child health
- Chronic diseases
- Communicable disease
- Mental health
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Vaccination programs
- Other

Risk Levels
- Low Risk: 60.6%
- Medium Risk: 38.5%
- High Risk: 1%

Channels
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Whatsapp

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Analysis

Compared to last month, July saw a 58% increase in the total number of online and offline collected rumors. This is predominantly likely due to incorporation of the theme of “Other Health Topics”, allowing for partners to capture a broader range of health-related rumors, which seem to be more prevalent to the local communities despite the overall rising number of COVID-19 cases.

Vaccine awareness is highly recommended in order to change attitudes and acceptance, especially within the most vulnerable communities who continually believe they will die after two years post-inoculation. Vaccine hesitancy remains a major barrier to controlling the epidemic in Lebanon.

According to the WHO, the Monkeypox outbreak has been declared a public health emergency of international concern.

In July, 20 suspected cases of Monkeypox were reported to the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, whereby 12 individuals were tested and 4 came out as positive. Given the increasing prevalence of Monkeypox cases locally and internationally, it is not surprising that July saw an increase in the number of rumors from the sub-theme of “Communicable diseases”. This also marks a clear information gap and need for further awareness on the symptoms and treatments of Monkeypox.

Additional rumors under the theme of “Other Health Topics” were monitored, including rumors about so-called headless sea creatures. These are in fact referring to the presence of non-native Jellyfish along the coast line, arriving through the Suez Canal. This is a yearly occurrence in Lebanon during the hot summer months. These rumors are likely to subside by the end of August.

Contact

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For more information on the project, visit
https://internews.org/resource/rooted-trust-rumor-bulletins-lebanon/