INTRODUCTION TO ROOTED IN TRUST

Rooted in Trust (RiT) is a project run by Internews to support humanitarian and public health agencies strengthen information ecosystems. The project ensures that health agencies better respond to communities’ needs and manage the spread of rumors and misinformation about COVID-19. Additionally, the project tracks misinformation on diseases like malaria, cholera, and dengue fever in the affected areas of north and south Yemen with a focus on IDPs and marginalized people.

In this bulletin, Internews profiles commonly occurring rumors across Yemeni social media and through the offline and face-to-face collection in the month of January 2023.

During this period, 227 rumors were collected online on Facebook and Twitter accounts. Additionally, 15 rumors were collected offline via face-to-face and private in person groups activities as well as other community engagement activities. Rumors were subsequently selected for this bulletin based on the recurring themes of “Death/Chronic Diseases/ Vaccination Programs.”

COVID–19 SITUATION IN YEMEN

Currently, there is less focus on Covid-19 in Yemen, leading to a scarcity of sources and information regarding the Corona pandemic in Yemen. This may result in an exacerbation of the health crises in Yemen.

The Yemeni journal, Al Ayam, based in Aden, reported that The World Health Organization has completely vaccinated more than a thousand people against the Coronavirus in Yemen. In a statement, The World Health Organization added “So far, about 514,000 people in Yemen – 5% of the total population - have been partially vaccinated against Covid. While 73,1779 people – 9% - have been fully vaccinated.” The World Health Organization acknowledged that these numbers are much less than the 2022 vaccination target of 2.4 million - or 30% of the adult population in Yemen. This target includes vaccination coverage of 90% of all healthcare workers, 50% of people with comorbid conditions, and more than 30% of the elderly (60 years and over).
Additionally, we as humanitarian workers who worked with an international NGO during the pandemic have witnessed humanitarian groups working with prisoners and we can attest that they follow the Geneva Convention’s Articles on the Treatment of Prisoners of War, which gives the full right to health treatment and protection. (3) Moreover, there are no outside organizations, that have control over what is happening in hospitals in Yemen. Hospitals and healthcare facilities remain the safest choice for individuals displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or other diseases. Doctors and nurses are best equipped to provide the community with life-saving medicines, treatments, and advice which will result in a safer and healthier community.

FACT CHECKING

The war in Yemen has caused problems for the country’s healthcare system and there are increasing numbers of prisoners being held throughout the country. It is also known that prisoners in Yemen have been subject to torture and death in connection to the ongoing war. Nevertheless, many prisoners were also reported to have died from contracting COVID-19. For example, in 2020 news outlets indicated that overcrowding in Yemeni prisons contributed to the rapid spread of COVID-19 (1) As such, we know that many prisoners in Yemen were at higher risks of contracting the disease. Therefore, while prisoners are dying for multiple reasons, we also know that prisoners and Yemeni citizens alike had died from the novel coronavirus.

According to Johns Hopkins University, until January 2023, 2,159 deaths occurred in Yemen from COVID-19 and 11,945 people contracted the virus. This means that 18.7% of Yemeni cases have died. (2) International organizations working in Yemen especially during the pandemic, like MSF, WHO, etc. adhere to national and international laws regarding the right to health. This right of treatment and health must be enjoyed without discrimination on the grounds of race, age, ethnicity or any other factor. Non-discrimination and equality require states to take steps to redress any discriminatory law, practice, or policy of prisoner rights and patient rights.

A post on Twitter on January 25, 2023, arguing that no one died from COVID-19 but rather died from the WHO’s protocols.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sanitation is one of the best defenses against contracting COVID-19. Washing hands, avoiding contact with others, and wearing masks are all proven methods for protecting individuals from COVID-19. It is important to listen to recommendations from the Ministry of Health. If possible, it is recommended to speak to local pharmacists about your COVID-19 concerns. Also, it is also recommended that individuals speak with their local doctors or healthcare professionals about their concerns over the virus, vaccinations, or other coronavirus related topics.
“In the complete absence of the state, a very important warning: Agricultural pesticides that are 90% carcinogenic, manufactured in China, have spread and reached #Yemen through the Emirates and Djibouti. Hepatitis virus disease has spread in a very large way, as bowel cancer and the majority of the patients are Qat chewers. In a frightening way where the state does not exist”

FACT CHECKING

Weak government oversight, lack of enforcement of laws, conflicts of interests, and the deterioration of the health system in Yemen, has contributed to the growing danger of pesticides to public health.

Pesticides: According to the report of the Stockholm Agreement Unit in the Yemeni Environmental Protection Agency, pesticides are readily available in Yemen for anyone who wants them, such availability and the demand for pesticides contributes to pre-existing problems, such as commercial fraud and smuggling of banned types of pesticides. (4)

Chronic toxicity from pesticides: Professor Abd al-Rahman Thabet notes the pesticides used in Yemen can result in either acute or chronic toxicity. Acute cases frequently come from qat users, who display symptoms like cough, dizziness, or nausea. Chronic cases occur after the ingested pesticides have accumulated within the body for several years. Such cases can lead to disease and deformities in offspring. The professor notes pregnant women in Yemen who regularly chewed qat, are known to give birth to children with physical deformities. (7)

Abdul Rahman Thabet from the Faculty of Agriculture stated: “As for us in Yemen, we annually import approximately 3 million liters / kg of pesticides.” These pesticides have reached more than 1,200 trade names circulating in the local markets.” (5) He adds: “80% of the pesticides in Yemen are used on the Qat tree. And 20% of it is destined for [greenhouses] to grow cucumbers.” (6)
Consult an agricultural engineer to know the type of pest that should be combated.

Find a reputable source of pesticides who is not selling illegally smuggled chemicals into Yemen.

Practice the healthy measures of washing, peeling and cooking very well the sprayed vegetables and fruits.

Avoid spraying when the wind speed increases. And make sure the right timing for spraying is during the early morning or afternoon.

Do not use banned and expired pesticides.

Read the instructions on the package label before using the pesticide.

Do not randomly mix pesticides.

Wear protective clothing and tools before using pesticides.

Avoid eating and drinking while spraying.

Only spray when safe, namely during the period between the last spraying of the pesticide and the first harvest.

Wash well with soap and water after spraying the pesticides.

Do not use pesticides for purposes other than pest control.

Never allow children or women who are pregnant or nursing to spray pesticides.

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This text was shared on Twitter on January 13 of 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Safety instructions for Yemeni farmers to avoid the harms of using pesticides:

- Consult an agricultural engineer to know the type of pest that should be combated.
- Find a reputable source of pesticides who is not selling illegally smuggled chemicals into Yemen.
- Practice the healthy measures of washing, peeling and cooking very well the sprayed vegetables and fruits.
- Avoid spraying when the wind speed increases. And make sure the right timing for spraying is during the early morning or afternoon.
- Do not use banned and expired pesticides.
- Read the instructions on the package label before using the pesticide.
- Do not randomly mix pesticides.
- Wear protective clothing and tools before using pesticides.
- Avoid eating and drinking while spraying.
- Only spray when safe, namely during the period between the last spraying of the pesticide and the first harvest.
- Wash well with soap and water after spraying the pesticides.
- Do not use pesticides for purposes other than pest control.
- Never allow children or women who are pregnant or nursing to spray pesticides.

Consumers of non-organic produce:

- **Eat a varied diet:** Limit your exposure to any one type of pesticide by consuming a variety of fruits and vegetables. This will help reduce your overall exposure to pesticides.

- **Choose produce with lower pesticide residues:** Some fruits and vegetables are known to have higher levels of pesticide residue than others. Consult the Environmental Working Group’s (EWG) annual “Dirty Dozen” and “Clean Fifteen” lists to help guide your choices.

- **Buy from local farmers:** Buying from local farmers can help reduce your exposure to pesticides by allowing you to choose produce that has been grown with fewer pesticides or none at all.

- **Be mindful of the season:** Produce that is in season tends to be fresher and may have been treated with fewer pesticides than out-of-season produce that has been imported from other regions.

- **Store produce properly:** Proper storage of produce can help prevent the growth of harmful bacteria and fungi, reducing the need for pesticides. Store produce in a cool, dry place and avoid leaving it exposed to the elements.
Rumor #3
Theme: Vaccination programs

“Vaccines cause infertility”

The Yemeni Ministry of Health answered inquiries about the effects of the Covid-19 vaccine on women and men. In response to a question, “Does the (COVID-19) virus vaccine cause infertility?” The National Center for Health Education and Information (a subsidiary of the Ministry of Health) said that there is no relationship between the (COVID-19) vaccine and infertility. This is supported by vaccination studies that show that no negative effects on reproduction for men or women as a result of the COVID-19 vaccines. (9)

Immunization prepares the body to fight serious infections that might happen in the future. Young babies are very vulnerable to infections, so they need to be protected as early as possible. Your child needs several different vaccines to be fully protected. In an article by Almuhamasheen Voice, this issue was discussed and many questions were answered by specialists contacted by Almhuamasheen Voice. (10)

FACT CHECKING

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- While there are concerns over the vaccine’s side effects, no studies have shown that the vaccine can cause infertility in men or women.
- Talk to pharmacists or doctors about fertility and vaccinations.
- You can call the free number of The Yemeni Ministry of Health: 01-250888 or 195 for more inquiries and questions.

Sources

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More Local sources for vaccines

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