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 offline and face-to-face collection in the month of March 2023. During this period 447 rumors were collected as follows: face-to-face (55), Online (392). The rumor collection was done online on Facebook and Twitter accounts and offline via face-to-face and private in-person group activities, as well as other community engagement activities. Rumors were subsequently selected for this bulletin based on the recurring themes of “Post-vaccination Behavior/ Vaccination Programs/ Other”.

COVID-19 SITUATION IN YEMEN

A lack of access to healthcare in Yemen continues to contribute to the spread of disease within the country. As of March 2023, only 54% of healthcare facilities are fully functioning while 46% are partially functioning. This limits many Yemenis’ access to basic medical care and health information. Compounding this issue is the continued displacement of Yemeni families, particularly in Ma`rib, Al-Hodeidah, and Ta`iz. Continued displacement of the population corresponds to the spread of disease from city to city and governorate to governorate.

By 2023, the spread of COVID-19 has slowed in Yemen with no new reported cases or deaths in March. While this is good news, there are still diseases that continue to spread throughout the country.

The cholera outbreak has decreased in part due to vaccination programs and international aid within the country. However, as of March 2023, Yemen has had the second highest number of measles cases in the world. A number of factors contribute to the country’s high rates. The Middle East Monitor reports that, in northern Yemen, Houthis continue to ban many vaccines, including the measles vaccine. They also note that ongoing malnutrition in the country and low rates of vaccination for young children likewise contribute to the outbreak.

Yemen continues to report new polio cases as of February of 2023. In response to this ongoing problem, Yemen announced a new polio immunization campaign in early March 2023. The campaign centered on door-to-door vaccinations, led by healthcare professionals and funded by the Saudi government.
“You don’t notice that this year’s flu virus is different from every year!!! It depends on you how many times it lasts with you, your chest and throat, the fever, the headache, and the shiver of cold are something that is not normal. may Allah help. It seems that the virus has mutated to be more virulent, or that Corona vaccines have abnormally weakened immunity”.

An online collected Rumor

Fact Checking

- While similar, COVID-19 and the flu are both caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, while the flu is caused by influenza viruses. Influenza viruses are known to mutate and evolve over time, leading to different strains circulating each year. [1]
- Common symptoms of flu include fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches, headache, and fatigue and symptoms differ from one person to another. Severity of symptoms can depend on various factors such as the person’s overall health, age, and immune system.
- Both COVID-19 and the flu can cause respiratory symptoms.
- Vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, are developed to help prevent infection or reduce the severity of illness. They are rigorously tested for safety and efficacy before being approved for use. [2]
- Dr. Sahel Al-Eryani, a Yemeni epidemiologist says: Vaccines are safe, and their side effects are very simple and temporary, not related to immunity, the side effects of vaccines are even less than the complications of paracetamol. There is no drug without side effects.

Recommendations

- Consistently practice good hygiene and avoid close contact with those who are sick. Seek medical advice from qualified healthcare professionals and follow their guidance when experiencing flu-like symptoms.
- For further questions and information about COVID-19 or any other health issues, contact the Ministry of Health (The National Center for Health and Population Education and Media). Toll free number: (195)
- Reach out to humanitarian and local organizations to understand health services and mechanisms of support that are available
- Maintain awareness from reliable sources on health issues ask questions from all organizations providing services to ensure accurate understanding of COVID-19.
“I agree with the fact that vaccines are harmful because of what I see from many children around me whose immunity has weakened and caused them diseases that did not happen to us, and this is due to the poor vaccines, poor storage and poor quality that they supply to Yemen.”

Rigorous studies of vaccines consistently show that they are safe for the population. Vaccines are tested and studied in multiple phases.9

Dr. Sahel Al-Eryani, a Yemeni epidemiologist states: storing vaccines is carried out according to international standards, and with supervision from UNICEF, and they have measuring devices for cooling from the time they leave the factory the time they are distributed to health facilities.

UNICEF provides cold rooms and installs solar-powered refrigerators to keep the vaccines at a constant temperature. 10

Dr. Sahel continues: “vaccines have the same factories and grades in all countries and [are] manufactured in specific factories for the whole world and distributed to all countries through the global vaccine program”

Yahya Bari, the Surveillance Coordinator, of Khairan Al Muharraq Directorate in Hajjah governorate says: “Now the cold chain system is excellent with the presence of solar energy, and each vaccine has a special indicator that determines the extent of its vulnerability if it is subjected to improper storage”.

Talking about if vaccines are harmful as claimed in some rumors, Yahya says “This is not true, as reality proves the quality of immunization, and those who got vaccinated when they were kids grew up healthy and they are already married, and have children too, and such rumors can make it worse of bringing us back to ignorance and deadly diseases”.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

For the Community

- Understand the fears of the community members and provide sources for accurate information
- When in doubt, seek answers from humanitarian organizations and health professionals
- Provide information that is relevant to children and that specifically targets children with regards to COVID-19.
- Target mothers and childcare providers with correct information on children receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and data on children recovering from COVID-19 in Yemen and neighboring regions
**Fact Checking**

- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause a range of illnesses ranging from the common cold to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). [12]
- Typical symptoms of MERS-CoV include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Pneumonia is common, but MERS patients may not always develop this condition.
- Human-to-human transmission is possible and has occurred primarily between close contacts and in healthcare settings. Outside healthcare settings, human-to-human transmission has been limited.
- A person’s mental state can contribute to their health. Studies have shown that individuals with elevated levels of stress and anxiety can be more likely to contract COVID-19.
- COVID-19 has caused considerable fear and anxiety among populations throughout the world [15]. However, the COVID-19 virus is not entirely caused by a person’s mental state. On the contrary, the virus spreads through the air and through touch. While it’s important to have a positive mental outlook, it is still far more important to prioritize physical health in the face of this disease.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**For the Community**

- Access resources and support available for mental health in the community, if none are available, request MHPSS support from organizations in your community.
- Seek awareness on mental health implications of COVID-19, including the incorrect spread of information from specific COVID-19 cases.
- Mental health issues transcend COVID-19 in Yemen given the current state of the country. Share needs with local organizations and with health professionals.

**Sources**