

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

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AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

28 November- 4 December 2023

(Weekly brief #99)

Top concerns

[Malaria and cholera cases surge due to hygiene risks by el niño floods](#)

Growing engagement and search interest around el niño and cholera for residents in flood-affected areas and African online agencies were tracked.

[Africans comment on the upsurge of respiratory illnesses among children in Northern China](#)

Concerns and false information about the upsurge of respiratory illnesses continue to be tracked, despite no detection of any unusual or novel pathogens in China

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Public Health Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This weekly report provides key highlights and operational recommendations based on social listening data from November 28 - December 4 in Africa.

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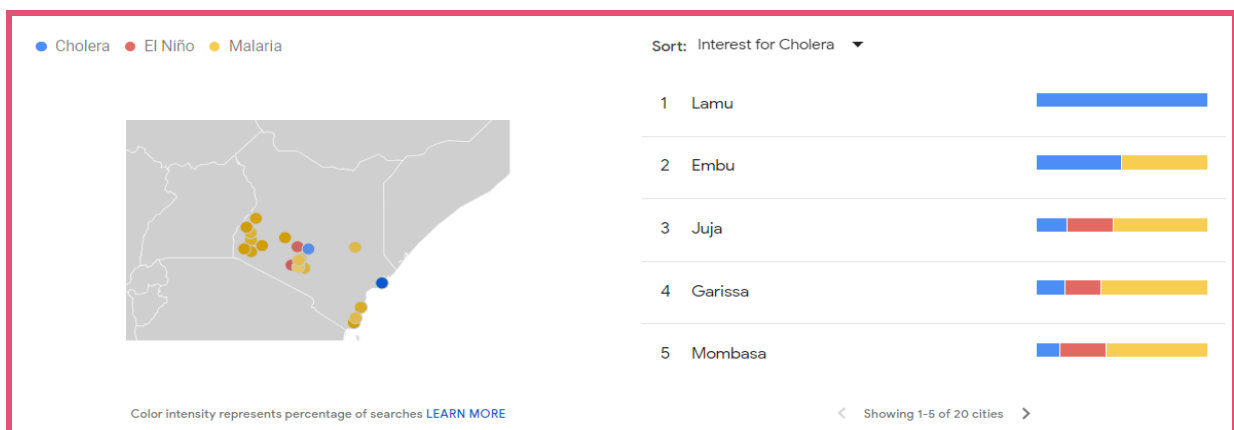
Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania

Malaria and cholera cases surge due to hygiene risks by el niño floods

Engagement: **45 posts, 8020 likes, 922 comments, 104K views**

Social media commentary and situation at a glance

- A surge in coverage from African online media agencies is shedding light on the escalating cholera situation in the Horn of Africa. Outlets such as [CRTV web](#), [RTB](#), [DefiMedia.info](#), initially reporting on Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Mauritius, have reported on the impact of floods in countries like Ethiopia and Kenya.
- Meanwhile, local media agencies drew attention to the repercussions of the ongoing El Niño, particularly wreaking havoc in various regions of [Kenya](#), [Ethiopia](#) and [Tanzania](#).
- According to [NTV Kenya](#), Garissa, Kuale, Mandera, and Wajir counties reported 391 cases of diarrhoea. In Lamu county, 94 cases of cholera have been documented. As per [Addis Standard](#), citing [Save the Children](#), the cholera outbreak in Ethiopia's Somali region is intensifying the plight of thousands of families displaced by recent floods. In a span of two weeks, 772 confirmed cases and 23 deaths have been reported. In Tanzania, floods & landslides caused at least [47 fatalities](#).
- Conversations about el Niño, malaria and cholera continue to represent a large share of engagements in Kenya. The below regions, reflective of a Google Trends search, demonstrate the highest levels of interest in them. Some of the concerns like [transportation challenges in flood-affected areas](#) like Lamu, [the state of water drainage and infrastructure](#) were tracked on TikTok.



Source: Google Trends, search term popularity of El Niño, cholera and malaria

Why is it concerning?

- As per the [Ethiopia health cluster bulletin](#), floods have affected 1.3 million people, with the majority in Somali (68%), Oromia (21%), South (6%), Gambella (4%), and Afar (1%) regions. The toll includes **54 deaths and over 600,000 displacements. Cholera is spreading further due to the floods.** This is marked by a 12% increase in deaths in November compared to the previous month. Many health facilities have been damaged or destroyed, depriving the population of essential health services.
- According to the [intergovernmental panel on climate change \(IPCC\)](#)'s regional fact sheet on Africa, the South Eastern Africa (SEAF) as defined in the report, is mostly vulnerable to projected changes. That includes “**increases in frequency and/or the intensity of heavy precipitation and pluvial flooding, observed and projected decreases in snow and glaciers, projected increase of average tropical cyclone wind speeds and associated heavy precipitation and of the proportion of Category 4-5 tropical cyclones.**”

What can we do?

- The transboundary nature of many climate change risks increases the need for climate-informed management, cooperation, responses and solutions through multi-national or regional governance processes.
- According to the Social science in humanitarian action platform ([SSHAP](#)), there are key considerations for information preparedness and community engagement that can be considered for el Niño, including
 - 1- Forecasting, participatory action and calls to action
 - 2- rapid vulnerability and barrier identification assessments
 - 3- Multi-channel and community preference mapping
 - 4- Coordinating RCCE, disaster risk reduction and hazard management

Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa

Africans comment on the upsurge of respiratory illnesses among children in Northern China

Engagement: **9 posts, 1638 likes, 202 comments**

Social media commentary and situation at a glance

- Social listening in Kenya has detected the circulation of a video [featuring footage from First Post](#), an Indian-based news website, with a history of

disseminating misinformation. The video raises questions about whether the current situation is a recurrence of the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic. The presenter queries whether this is attributed to a new variant or an entirely new disease, expressing concerns about transparency issues with China.



Source: First post

- CapeTalk, a commercial radio station in Cape Town, has a Facebook following of 100K. A commentator, known for endorsing global conspiracy theories, made comments alleging the intentional release of “[weaponized pathogens on unsuspecting global populations, framing it as the next ‘Plandemic’.](#)” The presenter briefly mentioned that hashtag [#NewCOVID](#) is trending on X.
- Lindaikjiblog, a Nigerian blogger with 386K followers, disseminated misinformation on Facebook, claiming “[an unknown and deadly canine respiratory illness that originated in China this summer has spread to the US](#)”. However, according to Dr. Mandy Cohen, the director of the US CDC, [the threat of respiratory illnesses in the US is not unexpected as the winter season approaches](#). There were no mentions of it being related to [the upsurge of respiratory illnesses in China](#).
- Droid, a Kenyan entertainment influencer with 288.3K followers, expresses concern on X that if [the respiratory illness reaches Kenya, it may not be effectively managed](#). Commentators reflect on memories from the COVID-19 pandemic, discussing [preventive measures](#) and questioning the reasons behind the “[creation](#)” of the disease in China.

Why is it concerning?

- The World Health Organization's request for additional information regarding the sudden rise in respiratory illnesses and pneumonia clusters among children

in China has garnered widespread global attention including online news agencies and anti-vax accounts.

- According to the WHO [risk assessment of the situation](#), “there is limited detailed information available to fully characterise the overall risk of these reported cases of respiratory illness in children. However, due to the arrival of the winter season, **the increasing trend in respiratory illnesses is expected**; co-circulation of respiratory viruses may increase burden on health care facilities”.

What can we do?

- Closely monitor how users react to new updates of the respiratory illness in China, and if there are conversations and rumours regarding Mycoplasma pneumoniae, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and potential implications on COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation.
- Examine the dissemination of reliable information promoting the benefits of vaccination during the winter season, with a particular focus on flu and COVID-19 vaccines. This can be amplified if posts specifically related to vaccination within the context of China or the United States are present.
- Build capacity with media partners especially small scale partners like bloggers on how to report on new COVID-19 developments, ensuring that headlines contain all relevant information and do not misrepresent the reality.
- Share fact-checked information already available online such as [No Causal Association Between RSV and COVID-19 Vaccine](#).

Persistent trends

Zambia, Uganda, Malawi

Anthrax outbreak hits several African countries

Engagement: **23 posts, 1440 likes, 339 comments**

Social media commentary and situation at a glance

Zambia

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in Zambia, in [its latest update on 23 November](#), reported that the veterinary department in Sinazongwe District of Southern Province has received an additional 6,000 doses of anthrax vaccines, bringing the total to over 90,000 doses.

- ZNBC Today [863K followers], a Zambian online news agency, reported that Southern Province permanent secretary Namani Monze, urged for increased awareness regarding the [difference between East Coast fever and anthrax](#).

Malawi

- NationOnline [209.7K followers], Malawi online news agency, posted on X that Mzimba district [has registered a case of anthrax](#). It's an eight-year-old girl who visited a private clinic, bordering Zambia's Lundazi District, a district that has reported two cases of the disease.

Uganda

- As of 2 December, Uganda reported 3 confirmed cases of anthrax and 2 confirmed deaths.
- Daily Monitor [1.7M followers] reported that President Museveni cautioned [residents in the districts of Kyotera and Rakai](#) against eating meat without establishing its source.

Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Mali

Dengue outbreak in African countries

Engagement: **31 posts, 7136 likes, 201 comments**

Social media commentary and situation at a glance

- [Save the Children reports a surge in dengue fever cases in 2023, surpassing annual figures from the last five years](#). The escalation is attributed to the growing frequency of extreme weather events, aiding the spread of this mosquito-borne illness. El Niño and the climate crisis are believed to have intensified the dengue fever outbreak this year.

Cape Verde

- The government of Cape Verde shared [individual](#) and [collective](#) preventive measures to mitigate the spread of the disease.

Burkina Faso

- As reported by BF1 TV, Burkina Faso is considering the [incorporation of a dengue vaccine into its response strategy against the disease](#). According to the Minister of Health, Dr. Robert Lucien Kargougou, though numerous vaccines exist on a global scale, the majority are currently in the testing phase.

Mali

- The Ministry of Health and Social Development announced on Facebook its [strategy to strengthen efforts](#) in responding to the dengue fever outbreak.

- The ministry shared updated epidemiological data on dengue with online users. Requests were made for translations into [Bambara](#) and inquiries were raised regarding the implementation of [collective preventive measures](#). Furthermore, a user described the outbreak as “another coronavirus project that did not work well, [so \[dengue\] is a creation of another project](#)”.
- ORTM (Office de Radio et de Télévision au Mali), with 836K followers, reported that [dengue in Mali is often mistaken for malaria, a situation similarly observed in Burkina Faso](#).
- Breakthrough ACTION Mali posted on Facebook that communication actors came together to create materials that [dispel rumours and disseminate safe, credible information](#) to effectively combat the dengue outbreak.
- Ibou SY, a Malian influencer with 56K followers, shared a post with the term "palu dingue," sharing misinformation as there is no distinct "palu dingue." Instead, there are separate entities of malaria and dengue. A commentator believes that local authorities lack effective communication about the disease thinking it is malaria. Another commentator inquired about preventive measures for the disease and how individuals can contract it.

Key resources

Climate change

- [UNICEF](#), The Kenya subnational children climate risk index-disaster risk model (CCRI-DRM)
- [SSHAP](#), Information preparedness and community engagement for El Niño in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region

Cholera

- [WHO](#), cholera outbreaks, Q&A
- [VFA](#), cholera social media toolkit
- [Global Task Force on Cholera Control](#), clarifying rumours and community concerns.
- [SSHAP](#), key considerations: socio behavioural insight for community- centred cholera preparedness and response in Mozambique, 2023
- [SSHAP](#), social, behavioural and community dynamics related to the cholera outbreak in Malawi, 2022

Malaria

- [WHO](#), Annual malaria report spotlights the growing threat of climate change
- [WHO](#), Annual world malaria report 2023

- WHO [initiative](#) to stop the spread of Anopheles stephensi in Africa
- [VFA](#), Malaria social media toolkit
- WHO malaria fact [sheet](#)
- Malaria threat [map](#)
- Malaria Social & Behavior Change Communication National [Strategies](#)

Anthrax

- [WHO](#), anthrax, Q&A
- [CDC](#), anthrax in Zambia
- [WHO](#), Guidelines for the surveillance and control of anthrax in humans and animals

Dengue

- [WHO](#), dengue, fact sheet
- [WHO](#), frequently asked questions

Methodology

The social media listening process relies on a combination of social media analyses conducted for French, English, and Lusophone-speaking countries.

The social media analysis for French-speaking countries is conducted by the AIRA Infodemic Manager Consultant based in Guinea, the one for Lusophone-speaking countries by the AIRA Infodemic Manager Consultant based in Angola, and the one for English-speaking countries by a WHO AFRO social media officer.

The final report is a combination of the three analyses and recommendations.

The shift from a social media listening monitoring conducted by only one person for the whole African region into a combined one based on the analysis conducted by three different people may result in a less detailed and exhaustive report.

Engagements, otherwise known as interactions, **refer to the number of likes, comments, reactions, and re-shares on a post.**

This is not a perfect measure of engagement:

- Some may have seen the post and chosen not to interact with it;
- Commenting on or re-sharing a post may constitute a more meaningful form of engagement than simply reacting to it;
- We are not systematically distinguishing between the types of responses that each engagement generates (e.g. while a post may contain misinformation, people may be countering/ debunking it in the comments).

We seek to mitigate these limitations by:

- Scanning comments and monitoring reactions to qualitatively evaluate responses to each post;
- Assessing the velocity of a post (i.e. how fast is it obtaining reactions, likes, and shares) and the re-emergence of specific themes;
- Identifying whether the post is shared across a variety of platforms and sources (broad engagement), or simply soliciting a high level of attention within a given community/ platform (siloes engagement).

The monitoring reports are produced using NewsWhip Analytics, Crowdtangle, Google Trends, and UNICEF Talkwalker dashboards as well as the WHO EPI-WIN weekly infodemic insight reports and the WHO EARS platform.

As a result, data may be biased towards data emerging from formal news outlets/ official social media pages and does not incorporate content circulating on closed platforms (e.g. Whatsapp) or groups (e.g. private Facebook groups).

We also rely on our fact-checking partners, who provide invaluable insights into relevant national and regional trends or content, as well as country-level reports, including the South Africa Social Listening Weekly Report and the Mali Social Listening Weekly Report.

In producing these summaries and recommendations, we have consulted community feedback survey reports, as well as monitoring and recommendations from AIRA partners. We also draw from WHO EPI-WIN weekly reports and UNICEF monthly reports to formulate recommendations. As we produce more content, we seek to triangulate and corroborate information across these groups to strengthen our infodemic response.