

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

1-8 April 2024

Weekly brief #114

Top concern

[Misinformation over cholera outbreak linked to nearly 90 deaths in Northern Mozambique](#)

Individuals who boarded a vessel and abandoned their homes based on unconfirmed existence of a cholera outbreak in Lunga, Nampula province in Northern Mozambique.

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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 April 1-8 in Africa.

For more information, please contact the WHO AIRA team:

Elsa Maria Karam karam@who.int, Elodie Ho hoelodie@who.int.

Mozambique

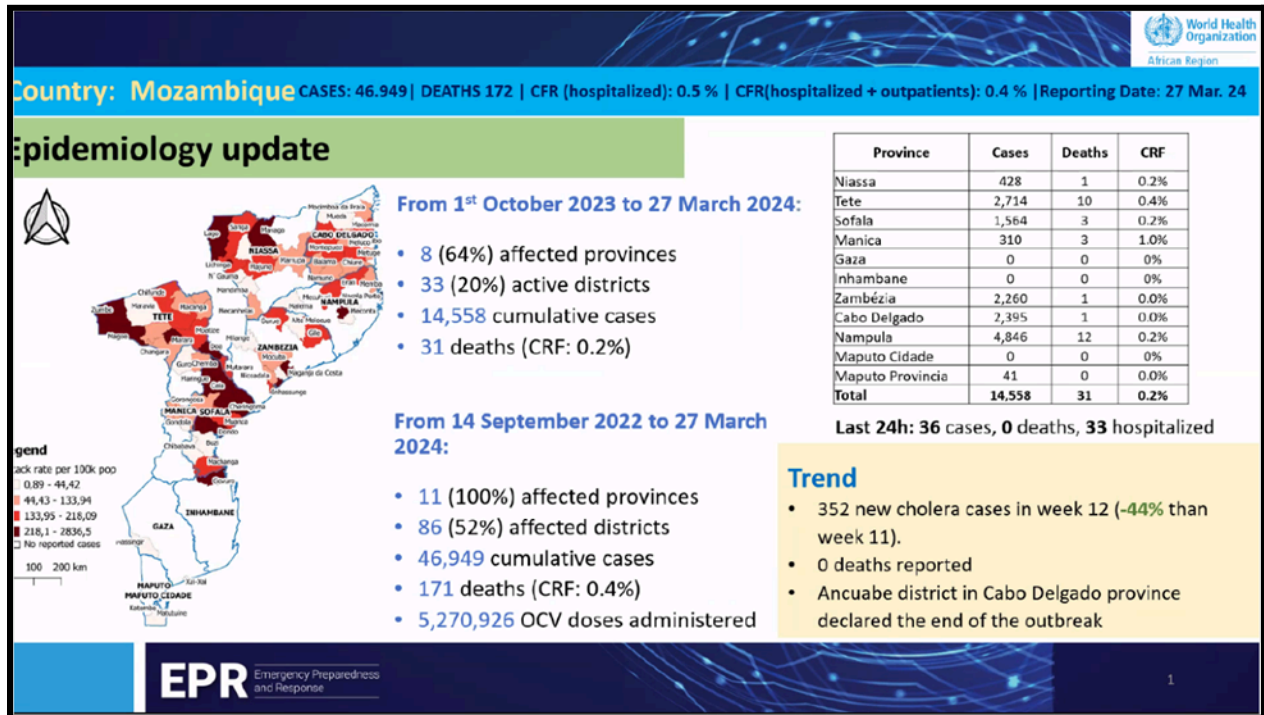
Misinformation over cholera outbreak linked to nearly 90 deaths in Northern Mozambique

Engagement: **15 posts, 15495 likes, 1637 comments**

- A total of eight Mozambican, four Kenyan, two Mauritian and one Tanzanian online news agencies have reported the death of at least 91 people after a ferry sank off the north coast of Mozambique. More than 130 passengers were on board, and were reportedly fleeing a cholera outbreak. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
- According to a video posted on the YouTube channel of [Miramar TV](#), a Mozambican television station, local authorities intend to investigate the reason for the families' displacement.
- According to the video, men instructed families to evacuate due to an alleged cholera outbreak and cases of diarrhoea in Lunga. However, the provincial health authorities reported no signs of cholera in Lunga, Nampula.
- Online users commenting on posts from Mozambican online news agencies have conveyed sadness regarding the significant loss of life and the broader situation. Mentions of local authorities or the misinformation that contributed to panic among citizens were absent from the online discourse. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

Why is it concerning?

- According to the WHO African Region's epidemiology update (graph below) on cholera in Mozambique, Nampula has reported the highest number of cases and fatalities in the country.



- Disinformation and misinformation about cholera in Mozambique is not a new phenomenon. In AIRA report #96, we reported the death of [a police officer, and the injury of four community leaders](#) for allegedly contributing to [the spread of cholera](#) in Zambezia province. In AIRA report #63, we reported that disinformation attributing the cholera outbreak to local authorities incited youth to attack, vandalise, and set fire to the residence of local authorities. Violent encounters between authorities and community members may further escalate if the cholera outbreak spreads to Lunga in Nampula. According to a referencia, an online media agency based in Mozambique, health [misinformation in Mozambique resulted in the murder of at least three community leaders and the destruction of 50 homes in the province of Cabo Delgado, in northern Mozambique.](#)
- In recent months, [Nampula province](#) has also welcomed internally displaced people fleeing jihadist attacks in the neighbouring province of Cabo Delgado.

What can we do?

- Reinforce social listening capacities to detect early rumours circulating online and in communities. Discuss the social listening findings with the cholera response teams and communities to dispel misinformation as early as possible.

- Enhance infodemic management capacities in Mozambique by providing comprehensive training to journalists to detect and dispel health misinformation in the media. Advocate for the establishment of infodemic management roles at the national and local levels to ensure coordinated efforts in combating misinformation at the grassroots level.

Trends to watch

Missed malaria diagnosis at Comorian local hospital raises concerns about reliability in medical analyses and institutions

- An [article](#) by the local news agency Al-watwan shed light on the negative experience of a father anxiously waiting for malaria test results of his daughter, hospitalised at El Maarouf National hospital.
- The confirmation of malaria, obtained by additional tests outside the hospital, casted doubt on the expertise of the local health facility.
- Online users commenting on the Facebook post concur that the hospital lacks competent health personnel.
- This exacerbates the prevailing distrust towards the healthcare system observed in the Union of Comoros. [AIRA report #111](#) documented distrust towards healthcare personnel and institutions during the cholera outbreak.

Phase 2 of clinical trials for Lassa Fever vaccine takes place in Abuja, Nigeria

- IAVI, a nonprofit scientific research organisation, shared on its [website](#) that “participants in Nigeria have been vaccinated with a Lassa fever vaccine candidate in the first Phase 2 clinical trial of any Lassa vaccine”.
- The IAVI-sponsored trial, funded by CEPI, anticipates enrolling over 600 participants across Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria where Lassa Fever is endemic.
- As per the website, the Phase 2 study will assess the safety, tolerability, and immunogenicity of the vaccine candidate at two dosage levels in adults, including those living with HIV, as well as in adolescents and children aged two years and older.
- Further social listening may be required should the vaccine progress to market availability.

Prospective anthrax vaccination campaign for livestock to begin in drought-affected regions in Zambia

- According to an article by [ZNBC today](#), the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, Makozo Chikote, has announced plans to start the vaccination of livestock in drought-affected regions before the end of this month.
- He said that the initiative aims to safeguard animals from potential anthrax outbreaks resulting from pasture scarcity.
- He also emphasised the significant impact of climate change on the sector, urging livestock farmers to responsibly manage the available resources in the country.

Debunk

AFP debunks claims that neem leaves heal HIV patients

- [AFP conducted a fact-check](#) on social media posts circulating in Nigeria, which claimed that neem leaves boiled in alkaline water could wade-off HIV in human cells.
- The debunk highlights that experts acknowledge ongoing research on the potential benefits of the neem tree in HIV treatment, **clarifying that it is not a cure**, even when soaked in alkaline water.
- We reported recent breakthroughs in [HIV/AIDS cure research](#) including a study conducted by a team of researchers in the Netherlands that demonstrates how **“CRISPR-Cas gene editing technology can be used to eliminate all traces of the HIV virus from infected cells in the laboratory”**.

Key resources

Cholera

- [WHO](#), global strategic preparedness, readiness and response plan for cholera 2023-2024
- [SSHAP](#), guidance note on community engagement for cholera outbreak response in the east and southern Africa ([ENG](#), [FR](#), [POR](#))
- [SSHAP](#), Enhancing Community Engagement Through Data Collection: Controlling the Cholera Epidemic in Mozambique
- [The collective service](#), cholera question bank for community level data collection

- [WHO](#), cholera Q&A
- WHO, Cholera RCCE key message bank ([ENG](#), [FR](#), [POR](#))
- [VFA](#), cholera toolkit

Methodology

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

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 (siloe 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.