



Rooted in Trust is a global and local humanitarian response by Internews that aims to combat the spread of rumors and misinformation around COVID-19 in Lebanon.

Internews and its partner Maharat Foundation are collecting rumors reported across Lebanese social media in an effort to combat misinformation to provide vulnerable communities with accurate information.

Internews and Maharat collected and analyzed 335 rumors about COVID-19 circulating on social media between November 9 and 22, 2020. This bulletin highlights not only rumors but community perceptions and criticisms about the following topics:

- Two-week, country-wide lockdown from November 14;
- Mistrust in PCR tests;
- Rumors about COVID-19 in schools;
- Aspirin as a treatment;
- Lebanese immunity to COVID-19.

COVID-19 SITUATION IN LEBANON

Lebanon is currently completing its second week of a country-wide lockdown and confirmed 1,188 cases on Wednesday, November 25 with a total of 118,664 cumulative cases to date*. Despite a continued increase in cases, Firass Abiad, the Manager of Rafiq Hariri governmental hospital, reported that hospital bed capacity has increased by 55 beds since the start of the lockdown, and that Lebanon has avoided a catastrophic rise in cases in recent weeks which could have overwhelmed the health care system [1]. Continued compliance to lockdown measures will help avoid hospital inundation in future weeks as case rates continue to stay high.

For medical emergencies, refugees can contact **NEXTCARE's hotline at 01-504020**. They can also go directly to any of the hospitals below and will be referred to NEXTCARE during working hours.

- Halba Governmental hospital
- Tripoli Governmental Hospital
- Zahle Governmental Hospital
- Baalbek Governmental Hospital
- Rafic Hariri University Hospital
- Baabda Governmental Hospital
- Saida Governmental Hospital

Organization	Service	Contact
Ministry of Public Health (MOPH)	For any matter related to COVID-19 including access to services, testing, and quarantine options.	01-59445 9 01-832700
World Health Organization (WHO)	For any matter related to COVID-19 including symptoms and support services	01-612970 01-612971 01-612972
NEXTCARE (UNHCR partners)	For Medical Emergencies including hospital admissions UNHCR-covered PCR testing	01-504020
Ministry of Education (MOE)	For inquiries about schools' closures and procedures around COVID-19	01-772186
UNICEF	For Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) Kits	70-582964
Endless Medical Advantage NGO	COVID-related services: medicine provision and home visits in the Bekaa valley, medical advice on care and quarantine for confirmed or supposed cases.	76-864721 https://www.facebook.com/EndlessMedicalAdvantage/
Lebanese Red Cross (LRC)	Can use emergency hotline to be referred to relevant COVID-19 services from LRC and medical assistance	140 Emergency hotline



WHAT'S IN A RUMOR?

Rumors are unverified information collected from a first-hand source within the community that could take the shape of a question, criticism, or general comment about a situation or topic.

In this bulletin, rumors were collected as data points from across various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp by Internews and Maharat from November 9 to 22, 2020.

*Source: Lebanon COVID-19 Dashboard <https://bit.ly/2Jhd04w>

RUMOUR #1: LOCKDOWN

Discussion around the two-week, country-wide lockdown were rife with criticism and confusion on social media. Criticisms questioned the ability of security forces to enforce such a lockdown, and the validity of a lockdown due to a perception of low case rates. Some posts also accused the security forces of using the lockdown as an opportunity to make money from fines and ticketing.

ANSWER
Around the world, lockdowns have been commonly used as a way to keep case rates low and to counter the spread of COVID-19. Likewise, lockdowns are used in countries with a weak medical capacity to help the medical sector avoid becoming inundated with severe cases at once. As such, a lockdown is an important step in helping the medical sector extend and maintain its capacity during an outbreak [1, 2].

Security forces have ticketed people not abiding by the lockdown at a rate of 50,000 Lebanese lira per ticket. As of November 24, 27,653 ticketed were issued for non-compliance to the lockdown [2]

“**‘The lockdown will not meet expectations, there are many opponents of it who will inevitably violate it.**

We are all tired of this epidemic, of government decisions, and the collateral damage they impose on citizens.’ posted by a Lebanese Doctor on his Facebook account.”

“

‘The PCR test is a game of chance. Two tests from the same lab may differ within 24 hours!’

Posted on Bint Jbeil Facebook page, which hosts more than 5 million followers.”

”

RUMOUR #2: PCR TEST

Mistrust and rumors about the PCR test (polymerase chain reaction test) have been circulating on Lebanese social media since at least October 2020. Recent rumors have recommended at-home methods for testing for COVID-19, and argued that the PCR test reflects as positive when a person has the common flu.

ANSWER

At-home testing methods are described as simple tests to gauge a person’s sense of taste and smell. While loss of these senses can be an early sign of COVID-19 infection, they are also symptoms of the common cold and seasonal flu. Likewise, not all covid-positive patients display this symptom according to recent studies. The PCR test provides a more conclusive result than at-home tests [3].

The rapid antigen test for COVID-19 is now available in Lebanon and is typically more affordable than the PCR test, which averages around 150,000 Lebanese Pounds per test. It is important to note that the antigen test is less likely to detect a confirmed case of COVID-19 early on in infection, because it requires a higher viral load than the PCR, meaning people must be further along in their infection for it to be detected.

Some organizations are providing free PCR tests, such as Rafiq Hariri Governmental hospital. For Syrian refugees, UNHCR covers PCR tests through their service partners NEXtCARE after receiving a prescription receipt from a physician. Refugees can also call the Ministry of Public Health hotline **(01594459)** or Lebanese Red Cross **(140)** to receive counseling from nurses about symptoms and to be referred to the proper channel for follow-up support.

“
‘Special message to Lebanese students: Minister of Education Tariq Al Majdoub conceals Corona cases in schools’ posted on ‘Tollab Lebnen’, Facebook page for Lebanese students.
 ”

RUMOUR #3: SCHOOLS

Rumors that the Education Minister was concealing COVID-19 cases in schools circulated on heavily trafficked social media sites in the past two weeks.

It is true that the Ministry of Education has not yet advertised case rates in schools. The Ministry confirmed on October 9, 2020 that some schools closed due to increased cases, but that they are dealing with each case individually.

The Ministry established an operations room to track transmission in schools as well as a 24-7 hotline where parents and students can call to inquire about relevant issues: **01772186**.

IMaharat Foundation called the hotline and inquired about case rates and were notified that the call center was not authorized to comment [4].

ANSWER

RUMOUR #4: FALSE TREATMENTS

The use of Aspirin to treat COVID-19 has been a common recommendation across Lebanese social media since at least October 2020. Videos of doctors saying that Aspirin reduces the rate of death in COVID-19 patients have circulated heavily in the last two weeks.

Aspirin has been confirmed to reduce severe symptoms of COVID-19, but has not been proven, until now, to treat the virus itself.

Aspirin is recommended for severe COVID-19 cases due to its benefits in boosting blood flow which can help reduce severe symptoms of the virus. However, it is so far not proven that Aspirin cures people of COVID-19 [5, 6].

ANSWER

“
‘The cure for Corona, a drug available in every household. Aspirin is the newest drug to be evaluated in a large-scale recovery trial.’
 Circulated on WhatsApp group Lebanon Now.
 ”

RUMOUR #5: LEBANESE IMMUNITY

A video of a doctor from Rafiq Hariri Hospital has been circulating on WhatsApp saying that immunity to COVID-19 is strong in Lebanon, and that the country has not witnessed death rates comparable to other European countries due to the genetic makeup of Lebanese.

Studies about how genes impact COVID-19 severity and infection is ongoing, but until now there is no evidence to support the argument that Lebanese people are less susceptible to severe COVID-19 illness and death than other communities.

There is some evidence to suggest that the existence of T-cells make a person more resistant to COVID-19 [7]. However, to date there is no evidence from the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health or other relevant bodies that Lebanese have a higher percentage of T-cells.

ANSWER

“
‘We are recording more than two thousand infections a day, but immunity in Lebanon is strong. Corona did not kill us as it did in European countries because of our genes.’
 quote from a Lebanese doctor, circulated on WhatsApp group Lebanon News.
 ”

SOURCES

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We welcome your feedback, questions, and suggestions to help local media produce reliable and accurate reporting on COVID-19. Please contact: Haley McCain, Project Coordinator (hmccoin@internews.org)

