Introduction to Rooted in Trust

Rooted in Trust (RiT) is a USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA)-funded project run by Internews to support humanitarian and public health agencies combat and manage the spread of rumors and misinformation about COVID-19. The first chapter (RiT1) ran from October 2020 to February 2021 with more than 2,774 rumors collected in Lebanon. The project was recently re-launched in September 2021 with its second chapter (RiT2.0) expected to run until end of 2022. In this bulletin, Internews profiles commonly occurring rumors across social media sites in Lebanon between March 1st and March 31st 2022. During this period, 40 rumors were collected from Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram, in addition to private groups and accounts that have a relatively high user engagement. 2 unique rumors were subsequently selected for this bulletin which fall under the recurring themes of Treatment & Cure, in addition to Hoax. These rumors were collected through our partners “Endless Medical Advantage”, who are active in engaging both the Syrian & Lebanese communities in the Bekaa region, and “Maharat”, who engage with different communities of all nationalities living in all regions of Lebanon.

COVID-19 situation overview in the country

According to IMPACT, Lebanon has seen 17,735 new cases over the month of March 2022 (1), with 5 new deaths according to WHO (2), and with the virus spreading more prominently among young and middle-aged adults aged 20 to 39 (3). As of mid-February of this year, 52% of the targeted population in the country has received at least one dose of vaccination (4); out of those, the majority are of Lebanese nationality at 72.45%, only 14.25% are of the Syrian nationality, and another 13.29% are non-Lebanese, including Palestinians living in Lebanon & migrant workers from different nationalities (5). Lebanon continues to be at Level 3 of community transmission, which means that high vigilance remains recommended, and that effort is to be focused on abiding by public health and social measures (6), such as getting vaccinated and boosted when eligible, wearing a mask where required and on public transit as well as places that are crowded and/or not well-ventilated, and getting tested if you’re sick (7).

Top Rumor Themes

- Hoax
- Symptoms
- Post-vaccination Behaviour
- Treatment
- Transmission
- Distribution

Important Numbers and Helplines:
- MOPH Hotlines: Corona 1787 | Vaccine 1214 (both free)
- COVID-19 call center 01-594459
- Airport Quarantine Section 01-629352
- Preventive Medicine Center 01-843769 | 01-830300
- Epidemiological Surveillance Unit 01-614194 | 01-614196
- WHO Lebanon 01-612970/1/2
According to UNFPA, maternal mortality is also on the rise with the ratio of maternal deaths having doubled in 2021 and shooting up to a startling 36 per 100,000 live births. Pregnant women who are COVID-19 positive are particularly at risk especially if they are symptomatic or have comorbidities, as new studies show (8). Furthermore, women who are pregnant or were recently pregnant are at increased risk of severe illness with COVID-19, which means that a higher number face an increased need to be hospitalized, have intensive care or be placed on a ventilator to help with breathing (9). With the economic collapse the country is currently facing, and the increasing cost of health services as well as inaccessibility to affordable and safe transportation, many people are opting not to seek medical help even when it is needed. For these reasons, a network of midwife coordinators has been set up to facilitate the referrals and health care access of high-risk pregnant women and pregnant women with COVID-19 in particular.

See below contact details for midwife focal points per area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governorate</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone #</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Bekaa</td>
<td>Zeinab Zeaiter</td>
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<td>Mimo Haddad</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:mimo_h_haddad@hotmail.com">mimo_h_haddad@hotmail.com</a></td>
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<td>03 544 587</td>
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</tbody>
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Migrant Workers

IOM recently stopped its support of migrants’ vaccination booths and transportation services from Dora and will focus its efforts on advocacy instead. Migrant workers can still access the vaccine at Rafik Hariri hospital regardless of their legal status.

→ Annex (A) at the end of this bulletin:
"Messages for Palm Sunday & Easter"

→ Annex (B) at the end of this bulletin:
"Key Messages for Ramadan"

Practical Resources

- WHO dashboard
- WHO COVID-19 page
- Protect yourself (English/Arabic)
- Q&A (English/Arabic)
- WHO Lebanon website
- MoPH relevant links: Twitter - Covid-19 Page - Vaccine Page
Recommendations
For Healthcare & Community Workers

- It is important for health and community workers to acknowledge the importance of eating healthy and nutritious foods that are rich in vitamins and that have anti-inflammatory properties when sick in general and not just with COVID-19. However, there is a big distinction to be clarified when talking about foods that help in recovery from diseases, and it’s that eating well alone is not enough to treat COVID-19 -or any other infection.

- Healthcare & community workers could benefit the community by explaining available WHO-approved treatment options. The two newest WHO-approved treatments include "Baricitinib", which is strongly recommended for patients with severe or critical COVID-19, and "Sotrovimab" for the treatment of mild or moderate COVID-19 in patients who are at high risk of hospitalization. The community deserves to be informed and updated about the newest treatment options before they become available, and encouraged to have conversations & be able to ask questions in awareness sessions with qualified health professionals about it in localized language to maintain high levels of trust so that when someone is sick, they visit health professionals and not try to self-medicate.

- When treatment options begin to be available locally, prepare and share real-time detailed and accurate informational content about the newest available treatment options, their uses, costs, eligibility criteria for infected patients, and accessibility in the form of infographics and online brochures is a simple and cost-effective way of explaining available treatment options in accessible, localized language or in the form of graphic content from trusted sources so that the community receives and believes scientific information before rumors. For now, you can refer people to MoPH hotlines: for questions about COVID-19 1787. For questions about vaccines: 1214 (both hotlines are free-of-charge). When treatment options begin to be available locally, prepare and share real-time detailed and accurate informational content about the newest available treatment options, their uses, costs, eligibility criteria for infected patients, and accessibility in the form of infographics and online brochures is a simple and cost-effective way of explaining available treatment options in accessible, localized language or in the form of graphic content from trusted sources so that the community receives and believes scientific information before rumors. For now, you can refer people to MoPH hotlines: for questions about COVID-19 1787. For questions about vaccines: 1214 (both hotlines are free-of-charge).

- According to Al jazeera, a new study done by Oxford university shows that while both the vaccinated and unvaccinated can have similar levels of the virus in their bodies, the vaccinated are less likely to have a severe infection, and less likely to pass it on to others, leading to less infections and less deaths. The study also found that the protection the vaccines offer against transmission becomes weaker over time, which means that getting booster shots is just as important as getting vaccinated in continuing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. (15)

- Starting March 1st, 2022, the Ministry of Public Health will start giving the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine to the age group 12-18 years, and the Moderna vaccine to the age group 19 and above. Anyone wishing to receive the Covid-19 vaccine can make a prior appointment through the COVAX platform: covax.moph.gov.lb or go to the nearest vaccination center without a prior appointment. (16)

Fact Checking

While some plant-based proteins and other foods and diets have anti-inflammatory properties, it is not possible to achieve any significant anti-inflammatory 'healing' effect through eating any one food. (10)

New studies show that the human liver produces an anti-inflammatory protein that can be helpful in treating very advanced cases of acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), a type of strong inflammation of the respiratory system caused by COVID-19, but this protein is not effective for treating COVID-19 virus itself or other symptoms caused by it. This treatment is specific to ARDS and requires the isolation of this protein in the bodies of healthy individuals and medical administration to people with ARDS. The rate the body would produce this protein is not enough on its own, and the treatment is still in its early testing & trial stages, so it is yet to be available worldwide & in Lebanon. (11)

A study done in Lebanon to measure the immunity status of the country has concluded that transmission was mainly happening through people who were showing no symptoms. Also, it showed that the percentage of people who tested positive was not enough to achieve a country-level “herd immunity”, which means that there is still a very high importance of adhering to social distancing and wearing of face masks to avoid transmission and infection, as well as getting vaccinated. (12)

List of vaccination centers accepting walk-ins: (17)

https://twitter.com/mophleb/status/1498337274840457218
According to MoPH, 118,405 healthcare workers, which include physicians, nurses, midwives, and other community healthcare workers in Lebanon have been registered to get vaccinated, while no data is recorded on the exact percentage of them that did get the vaccination, it is safe to say that most of them were able to due to being prioritized in the vaccine roll-out plan.

The overall intention to receive a COVID-19 vaccine among the Lebanese adult population was 51.5%, with healthcare workers expressing a higher willingness of getting vaccinated against COVID-19 than non-healthcare workers, with the percentage of 65.8%.

Factors that drive vaccine willingness are:
- being of an older age
- being married
- living in urban areas
- receiving influenza vaccine for this season
- having more knowledge around benefits of vaccination
- having concerns related to availability and accessibility of vaccines
- having trust in health authorities
- vaccine intake by the public
- self-motivation.

Factors that drive vaccine hesitancy are:
- Living in rural areas
- previous refusal of any vaccine
- concerns about vaccine safety, and side effects impacted
- female gender
- importance accounted to religiosity
- concerns about the reliability of the manufacturer.

Around 12 months of data collected around vaccine safety, including data from tens of thousands of participants in clinical trials before that, show that the vaccines are safe and effective at preventing serious disease or death due to COVID-19.

Recommendations

- Volunteer for the MoPH’s latest vaccination campaign that will include the largest possible number of citizens and residents for public safety. Volunteers will help those who are not yet registered on the COVAX platform, as well as participate in different activities around this ongoing vaccination campaign. Medical and nursing students can participate in the volunteering process. Volunteers will receive a participation certificate from the MoPH. Those who wish to volunteer can use this link to apply: (22) https://ee.kobotoolbox.org/w/JDFjcKDE or send a message to the following phone number: 81-303889

- If you can not volunteer yourself, share this invitation with your networks of people who can and are interested.

- Plan events and activities that are centered around strengthening communication between health professionals and community members such as public talks, seminars, Q&A sessions, and awareness sessions as well as WhatsApp groups which include community healthcare workers and members of the community, and encourage trusted health authorities you are in touch with to use these platforms in reiterating their support of the vaccine and sharing their experience with doses and boosters.

- Promote media & social media content that promote vaccination and ask healthcare workers in centers and hospitals to display their vaccination cards publicly.

- These above steps would help the community see for themselves that the real majority of healthcare workers they know and trust are vaccine advocates.

Know your facts when it comes to vaccine side-effects: some people get side effects that disrupt their day-to-day activities, they are not life-threatening and go away on their own after a few days. Others experience no side-effects at all. (23) Common side-effects include pain, redness & swelling around the place where the vaccine was administered, as well as tiredness, headache, muscle pain, chills, fever, & nausea. (24)

Abide by the 15-20 minute waiting rule at vaccine centers, because serious safety problems associated with the vaccines are rare (25) and are mitigated by keeping and monitoring people for 15-20 minutes post-jab at vaccination centers, where they can get necessary medical attention in case it is needed.

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According to the same study: (20)

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According to key religious figures, taking the vaccine during fasting hours in Ramadan will not break your fast, and it is considered religious duty to practice COVID-19 precautionary measures to protect your community.
(B) Key Messages for Ramadan

Sources

2. WHO Covid-19 Daily Brief March 31st 2022
3. Same source.
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   - b. Arabic: https://twitter.com/mophleb/status/1498585923331801094
20. Same source
25. Same source