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. (1) 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 and offline through our partners’ activities in Lebanon between 1 and 31 May 2022. Our partners “Endless Medical Advantage” are active in engaging both the Syrian & Lebanese communities in the Bekaa region, and “Maharat” engage with different communities of all nationalities living in all regions of Lebanon.

During this period, 51 rumors were collected from Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram, in addition to private groups and accounts that have a relatively high user engagement. An additional 160 rumors were collected offline through aimed activities conducted by our partners, with the goal of reaching populations and groups that are less active online and who get their rumors through word of mouth.

2 unique rumors were subsequently selected for this bulletin which fall under the recurring themes of “Vaccine”, “Hoax”, “Long COVID,” and “Death.”

COVID-19 situation overview in the country

Lebanon has seen 2,790 new cases over the period spanning the 1st till 30th of May, with 48 new deaths. (2) but the number of cases and deaths is likely an underestimate, since many people are not getting tested due to high expenses of transportation as well as PCR tests. Total number of administered vaccine doses across population is 5,645,233 as of June 3. The virus spreading more prominently among young adults aged 20 to 29. (3) There are 236 ICU beds available for the COVID-19 response across Lebanon with an occupancy rate of 3% and Lebanon is now situated in Level 2 of community transmission. (4) High vigilance continues to be recommended with a focus on abiding by public health and social measures and increased vaccine coverage. (5) Vaccine roll-out now includes people of all nationalities living in Lebanon, including Syrians, Palestinians, and migrant workers, even if their residency documents are not up to date. People still excluded from the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out campaign are children under the age of 5 years old.
There is no data that suggests the existence of a link between COVID-19 vaccines and cancer, its recurrence, or its progression. Above that, individuals who have cancer are recommended to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

The recent outbreak of monkeypox cases in over 23 countries has understandably caused concern, and rumors and hoaxes regarding purported links between COVID-19 vaccines and the monkeypox outbreak have spread rapidly. However, there is no evidence to suggest that monkeypox is one of the side-effects of COVID-19 vaccines. The first human case of Monkeypox was recorded in 1970 long before the development of COVID-19 vaccines began in 2020, which means that the Monkeypox virus has existed for around 50 years before the vaccines were being made.

Over 12 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered throughout the world since December 2020, while the number of confirmed and suspected cases of monkeypox remain comparatively minuscule: as of May 26, 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported a mere total of 257 confirmed cases and 120 suspected cases of monkeypox, none of which were in Lebanon or anywhere close in the region.

Monkeys can become infected if a person is close to an infected person (for example, on the same bed, in the house, or in the same room). Engaging in sexual intercourse, touching the skin or fur of infected animals, or eating improperly cooked meat from an infected animal.

In early 2022, false quotes attributed to late French virologist Luc Montagnier, who discovered human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), made the rounds on social media, whereby Montagnier supposedly suggested the existence of a link between booster shots of COVID-19 vaccines and HIV. These claims are categorically false, and "there is no association between COVID-19 vaccines and risk for HIV infection". Authorized COVID-19 vaccines do not contain, nor do they cause, HIV or AIDS. The contents of the Pfizer vaccine can be seen here, contents of the Moderna vaccine can be seen here, and contents of the AstraZeneca vaccines can be seen here.

Right now in Lebanon, both the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccines are available through MoPH vaccination centers, which the MoPH ensures are safe for use and within their expiry dates.

An official statement from the MoPH says that “There are strict precautions in place to help ensure the safety of all COVID-19 vaccines. Before receiving validation from WHO and national regulatory agencies for emergency use, COVID-19 vaccines must undergo rigorous testing in clinical trials to prove that they meet internationally agreed benchmarks for safety and efficacy.”

According to WHO, globally as of 6 June 2022, there are 530,896,347 cumulative cases and 6,301,020 deaths. In Lebanon, as of 31 May 2022, there are 1,099,199 cumulative cases and 10,429 deaths.

COVID-19 can be severe and has caused millions of deaths around the world as well as lasting health problems in some who have survived the illness.

In the first 3 months of 2020, nearly 6,000 people around the globe were hospitalized because of coronavirus misinformation. Recent research suggests. During this period, researchers say at least 800 people may have died due to misinformation related to COVID-19.
Inform society about COVID-19 vaccines, their side-effects, and how they have no link with other diseases. This can be done through appearances in the emerging alternative media outlets on social media platforms, as well as in mainstream media outlets (e.g., television stations in Lebanon) as the late Dr. Roy Nasnas had done during the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. (24)

Print brochures that are rich with visuals like the one below, spread informative voice notes, and share simple videos with voice-overs on instant messaging applications (such as this one by Campji: https://fb.watch/dPNWNNXxmH/) to reach people who can’t read or who have no presence online. (25)

Awareness-raising efforts should be coordinated with the Ministry of Public Health, particularly when it comes to promoting the ministry’s Circular 23 on the Identification of Monkeypox Cases so that the appropriate measures can be taken should a monkeypox case be suspected or detected.

The spread of fake news about COVID-19 has caused harm and deaths that could have been avoided. There are various sources online for personal testimonies from people who contracted the virus, and even those who once believed it was a hoax, in Lebanon and abroad which can give a human face to the virus. Re-publicizing the testimonies of these people -and more importantly, picking people who are from the communities you are trying to influence- is a good strategy for dispelling this rumor. Another option would be interviewing key people from your target communities in short videos.

Explain the dangers of dropping protective measures on communities with lack of access to healthcare, specifically and encourage these communities to get vaccinated by providing transportation for people to get to and from vaccination centers, enhancing mobile vaccination units across Lebanon, especially in rural areas, and enhancing the organization of vaccination marathons to increase vaccine uptake.

Local communities should obtain their information from trusted sources and share materials within their communities (e.g., infographics; short informative videos, voice notes) via social media and instant messaging applications.

From the campaign “#لبنان لنحن:” For all cancer patients who cannot find their medicines in Lebanon, or are finding them but they are unaffordable, please contact us via WhatsApp on the following number: 76303335 to secure the medicines at a much lower price.

If you or anyone you know has HIV or AIDS, and require urgent support, assistance, and/or counseling you may dial any of the centers here. (26)

Know your facts when it comes to vaccine side-effects: some people get side effects that disrupt their day-to-day activities for a short period of time, they are not life-threatening and go away on their own after a few days. Others experience no side-effects at all. 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. (27)

If you experience side-effects that you are concerned about, you can contact the MoPH vaccine hotline free-of-charge on 1214 to report your symptoms. (28)

Consider getting vaccinated if you are eligible. Starting March 2022, the Ministry of Public Health has started giving the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine to the age group 12-18 years, and the Moderna vaccine to the age group 19 and above. (29) Anyone -including Palestinian, Syrian, and Migrants of different nationalities even if their residency papers are not up to date, 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.
A recent large study to comprehensively assess the long-term impact of COVID-19 on cardiovascular health has suggested that people remain at increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, heartbeat irregularities (arrhythmia) and other complications a year after catching COVID-19 – regardless of the severity of their initial illness. (30)

COVID-19 can lead to heart problems among people who never had heart issues before, but people with pre-existing cardiovascular disease face greater risk. (31) If you have heart disease risk factors, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, or high cholesterol, you also face a higher risk of serious complications. (32)

Risk factors also include old age, obesity, and diabetes mellitus. More specific risk factors are likely to be already-damaged blood vessels. (33)

A study from Sweden published by The BMJ today finds an increased risk of deep vein thrombosis (a blood clot in the leg) up to three months after COVID-19 infection, pulmonary embolism (a blood clot in the lung) up to six months, and a bleeding event up to two months. (34)

Risks were highest in patients with more severe COVID-19 and during the first pandemic wave compared with the second and third waves, which the researchers say could be explained by improvements in treatment and vaccine coverage in older patients after the first wave. (35)

Most people infected with COVID-19 will only experience mild or moderate respiratory illness and will recover without the need for hospitalization or specialized care. (36) However, according to the WHO, between 10 and 20 percent of people who fully recover from a COVID-19 infection experience several mid- and long-term effects, collectively known as “Long COVID.”

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**Fact Checking**

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**Practical Resources**

- Protect yourself (English/Arabic) ([https://covid19.who.int](https://covid19.who.int))
- Q&A (English/Arabic) ([https://covid19.who.int](https://covid19.who.int))
- WHO Lebanon website ([https://www.who.int/ar](https://www.who.int/ar))
- MoPH Lebanon COVID-19 information page ([moph.gov.lb](https://www.moph.gov.lb))
- WHO Refugee and Migrant Health Q&A ([https://covid19.who.int](https://covid19.who.int))
- WHO Lebanon website ([www.who.int/ar](https://www.who.int/ar))

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"Warning about sudden and deadly side effects that might affect people who recovered from Corona: Heart attacks, brain strokes, and pulmonary embolism."

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Rumor #2

Long COVID, Death

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1787

Corona

Vaccine

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Organize community events in different communities by inviting trusted health professionals and community leaders to shed light and give examples on why some people experience more severe side effects than others.

Share information through face-to-face activities such as community workshops, awareness sessions, community dialogues, social mobilization activities, meetings with religious leaders and faith-based organizations, door to door activities, and through key people in the community such as activists and volunteers.

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
- Hospital Admission Hotline 01-832700
- LRC Emergency Hotline 140
- LRC Medical Consultations and Oxygen Machine Request for COVID-19 Patients Hotline 1760
- Endless Medical Advantage – Bekaa number for information and referral services 76-864 721
"Warning about sudden and deadly side effects that might affect people who recovered from Corona: Heart attacks, brain strokes, and pulmonary embolism."

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**Rumor #2**

**Long COVID, Death**

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**Recommendations**

For the Community

- If you **experience side effects** that you are concerned about **after recovering** from COVID-19, you can **contact the MoPH vaccine hotline** fee-of-charge on 1214 to **report your symptoms**.

- **Practice preventative measures** such as masking, avoiding crowded and closed, unventilated places, and regular hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or sanitizing your hands if clean water is not available. This helps communities stay protected not just from COVID-19, and subsequently Long COVID, but also from multiple air-borne diseases as well as other infectious diseases.

- **Get vaccinated if you are eligible.** Starting March 2022, the Ministry of Public Health has started giving the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine to the age group 12-18 years, and the Moderna vaccine to the age group 19 and above. **(41)** Anyone - including Palestinian, Syrian, and Migrants of different nationalities even if their residency papers are not up to date, 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.

- **Getting vaccinated** not only **protects you** from a potentially dangerous COVID-19 infection, but also **protects your community**, and **can prevent you from getting any long COVID symptoms or other side-effects.** A recent study found that the odds of experiencing Long COVID symptoms that persisted for at least 12 weeks decreased by an average of 13% after a first COVID-19 vaccine dose. **(42)**
Sources

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4. Same source
5. Same source
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10. Evolution of the COVID-19 vaccine development landscape (nature.com)
13. https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/monkeypox/
14. https://www.reuters.com/article/factcheck-boosters-hiv-idUSL1N2UM1Q0
17. NDVP Lebanon (moph.gov.lb)
18. The MoPH Ensures That Safe And Effective Vaccines Are Strictly Used
30. https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/monkeypox/
33. Study finds risk of serious blood clots up to six months after covid-19 | BMJ
34. Same source
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