

**HOW WE DO IT**

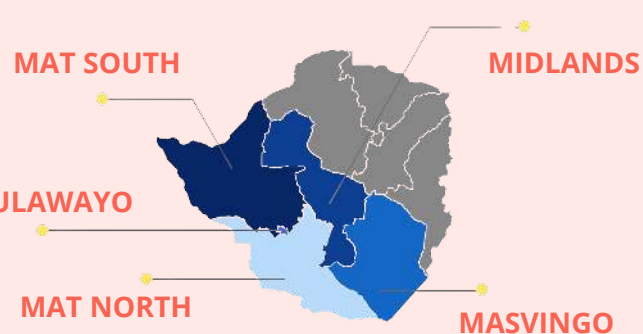
**This bulletin** aims to help mitigate the spread of rumors and misinformation about COVID-19 response in Zimbabwe. It provides health and humanitarian organizations with rumor trends identified through systematic collection and analysis of social media listening data. Rumor trends identified, and analysis done are to help humanitarian actors and health workers better inform their Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) strategies.

**Rumors** in the Bulletin were collected by Internews Zimbabwe, for a period of two weeks from February 9, 2022, to February 22, 2022. Overall, **Internews identified a total of 52 rumors from various posts and comments** from Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Rumors selection criteria is based on a risk assessment matrix that accounts for the frequency of the discussion or social media engagements and its potential impact in the community.

# THE RiT HUMANITARIAN BULLETIN

Rooted in Trust 2.0 (RiT 2.0) is a global pandemic information response program funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID-BHA) and implemented by Internews to counter the unprecedented scale and speed of the spread of rumors and misinformation on COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines.

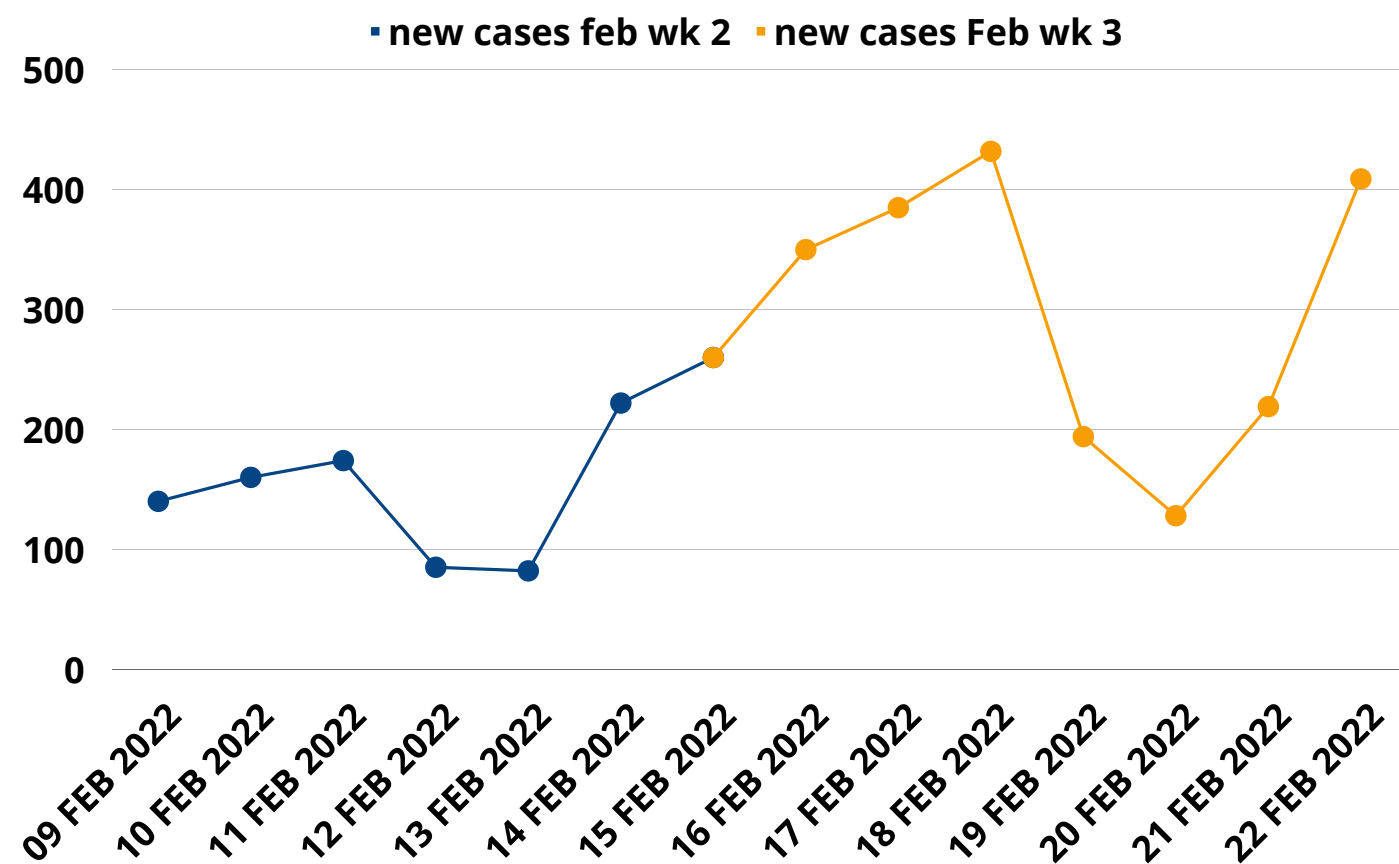
Rooted in Trust 2.0 in Zimbabwe is working with media, community-based organizations and health and humanitarian actors to build a healthier information ecosystem that is responsive to the needs of migrant communities in Southern Zimbabwe, particularly in:



**COVID-19 UPDATE** **SITUATION**

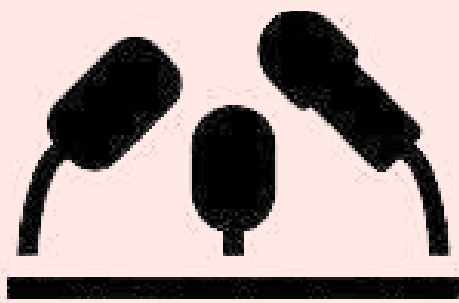
**Statistics from the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC)**

**New COVID-19 cases Feb wk 2 vs Feb wk 3**



- Tracked data showed a sharp increase (192%) in new daily recorded COVID-19 cases between February 9, 2022, and February 22, 2022.
- As at 1 March 2022, there were 65 hospitalised cases with 13 new admissions, 11 Asymptomatic, 47 mild to moderate, 6 severe and 1 in intensive care units (ICU).
- The average mortality per day remained as 1 during the reporting period and the National recovery rate stood at 96%.
- Increases are largely attributed to the reopening of schools.

Visualisation by Rit ZW



## Government announcement

On February 16, 2022, Zimbabwe's government announced the reopening of Land-borders after a long COVID closure.

### Big media stories

·A report on 131 COVID-19 cases in Matabeleland North and Masvingo province schools on the second week of schools opening [Link](#)

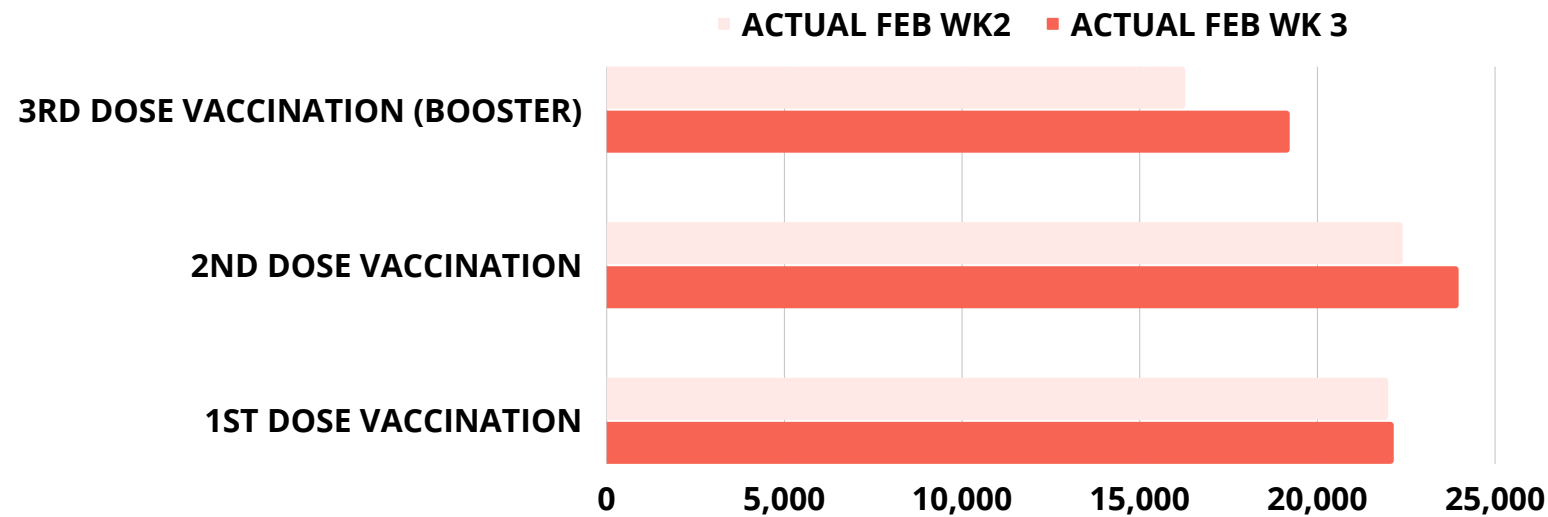
·A warning from health experts on a 5th wave of COVID-19 [Link](#)

·A report on the death of two people as cases increase [Link](#)



## VACCINATION UPDATE

### Week on week vaccination update



### Visualisation by Rit



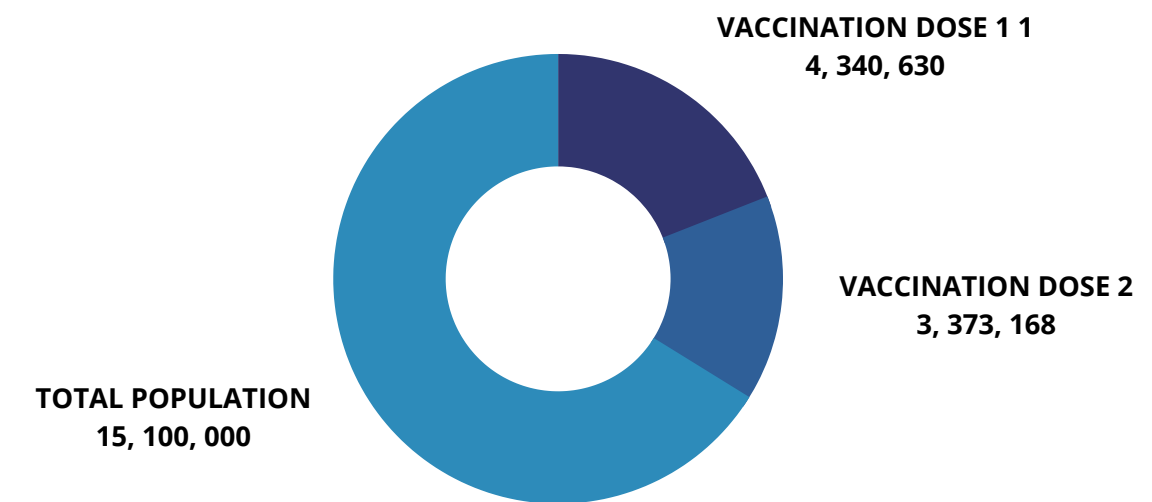
·On February 22, 2022, the Government through the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services announced the extension of vaccination to minors between ages of 12 and 15 years as part of its strategy to achieve herd immunity.



The announcement triggered mixed reactions and conversations on social media platforms exposing embedded community beliefs, fears, and misinformation on vaccines. The announcement largely received negative reactions with people spreading rumors that the vaccines were being extended to children as they are about to expire and that they have not received the required laboratory tests before they were extended to children.



### Vaccination uptake against total population



- A total of 3.37 million people have been vaccinated from a total population of 15 million in Zimbabwe to date.
- This accounts for 36% of the targeted herd immunity of 9 400 000 people.
- The booster shot uptake stands at 92 522 shots which is 0.027 of the people who have taken two doses.
- The vaccination efforts in Zimbabwe could be contributing to reduction in daily cases, mortality rates and hospitalised cases.



### RUMOR TREND



*You honestly think a face mask with its many pores can prevent infection? The things that people believe.... geez. If the virus can be screened by a porous mask, then it must be as big as a fly.*

(Twitter 2/18/2022)

**RUMOUR THEME:** Prevention

#### What's behind the rumor

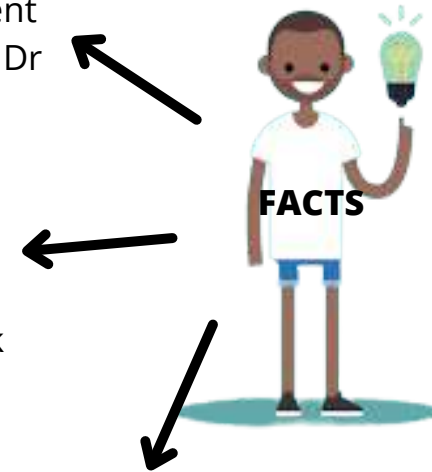
A twitter post by a renowned medical Doctor highlighting poor compliance with COVID-19 prevention protocols in public health institutions triggered a negative response from a follower who suggested that wearing face masks does not prevent COVID-19 infection.

The doctor's observation and responses from Twitter followers indicate growing complacency in the observation of COVID-19 prevention practices in Zimbabwe. A social media movement advocating for removal of mask regulations has been observed on Twitter and Facebook.

Wearing of masks "reduces chances of spreading the COVID-19 virus in the event that the one wearing it is infected," said Dr Prince Murambi, a health specialist.

Scientists in a global study found that mask wearing was linked to a 53% fall in the incidence falling sick from COVID-19.

Wearing of face masks has been recommended by World Health Organization (WHO) as part of a "comprehensive package of prevention and control measures to limit the spread of COVID-19" as masks alone cannot adequately protect people from spreading or being infected with COVID-19.



#### why this is **IMPORTANT**

By questioning the effectiveness of the use of masks in infection control, this rumor has the effect of promoting complacency amongst community members towards adhering to COVID-19 prevention protocols, specifically wearing of face masks. Communities may presume that it is not important to wear masks, as they do not contribute to infection control, thus leading to high rates of infections.

#### Conclusion

Rumors collected by RiT 2.0 in the period under review mainly indicated a relaxed attitude around adhering to COVID-19 prevention protocols amongst Zimbabweans, and this was attributed to fatigue of adhering to COVID-19 prevention protocols. Considering the increasing statistics of COVID-19 cases, this has the implication of a possible increase in infection rates, especially in the face of by- election campaigns where large crowds are gathering without adhering to COVID-19 protocols. Key thematic issues to be emphasized include sharing information on infection control protocols of COVID-19 with special focus on proper wearing and disposal of masks to cross border traders, vendors who are a mobile community, school children as well as ordinary citizens.

#### Tips for humanitarians

- Adapt materials to the spoken language of the different communities and groups:** Humanitarian organisations can distribute COVID-19 Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials explaining the importance of wearing face masks and adhering to other COVID-19 prevention protocols in local languages to enhance understanding of these measures in communities. Focus may be on mobile communities such as vendors, cross border traders, as borders have recently been opened and school children.
- Remind health care workers about the important role they play in communicating with the public:** Partners working in the Health Sector should remind health care workers in health institutions about their influencing position as role models in wearing correct PPE (personal protective equipment) especially when dealing with the public.
- Consider the upcoming public gatherings:** While some people have begun developing a relaxed attitude around adhering to COVID-19 prevention protocols, there is need for partners to continuously educate people around proper wearing of masks, and the correct disposal of masks, in addition to other prevention protocols. This is imperative, during this election season as political parties hold widespread public rallies as they gear towards By- Elections scheduled for March 26, 2022.
 

§Questions remain – identify them and facilitate the dialogue: Humanitarian actors should facilitate community dialogues for listening and responding to community challenges and hesitations around COVID-19 prevention practices.