

# RUMOR BULLETIN

NOVEMBER 2020

FOR HUMANITARIANS



## Internews

Local feedback on the pandemic was collected by Internews' analysts, who compiled and assessed rumors gathered from Sudanese social media, focusing on popular groups and pages with large numbers of followers. This second bulletin is based on 75 Arabic language posts compiled from Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp between 23 October to 5 November 2020.

The rumors identified have been assessed to be the most prevalent or damaging to the health response. For example, rumors which encourage people to ignore preventive measures, resort to ineffective treatments, or avoid seeking medical assistance.

Since the start of November, Sudan has seen an almost six-fold increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases. Between 1 and 10 November 2020, Sudan recorded 527 COVID-19 cases, compared to 91 between 21 to 30 October 2020. COVID-19 has become a more prominent topic of conversation both on the street and on social media, especially after several high-profile politicians and officials were diagnosed with the illness. This has led to speculation that another lockdown may be introduced, as well as more specific questions about the symptoms of the virus and where to find testing centers.

## COVID-19 SITUATION IN SUDAN

Sudan reported its first case of COVID-19 in March 2020. As of 10 November, the official number has risen to 14,155. Most cases identified have been in the capital Khartoum and surrounding areas. Outbreaks have been reported in conflict-affected areas such as North Darfur, but limited testing capacity has made it difficult to identify its true extent. Sudan's health system suffers from years of underfunding, lack of staff, medicines, materials, and medical supplies. This has been exacerbated by devastating flooding, and other health outbreaks, including cholera, polio and rift valley fever.

Medical humanitarian organizations continue to support Sudan's COVID-19 response, by training healthcare personnel, and providing medical and testing supplies. United Nations agencies and partners created a COVID-19 Country Preparedness and Response Plan (CPRP), as well as ramping up coordination between various NGOs, to support the Government of Sudan.

## WHAT PEOPLE SAY

***"These are all lies... it is probably a cold or seasonal flu"***

Colds, flu and Covid-19 have similar symptoms but are caused by different viruses. It can be hard to judge which one you may have. The adjacent chart, showing the difference documented by the [World Health Organization](#). People with COVID-19 have a wide range of symptoms, ranging from mild to severe, although some will have none at all, but can still be infectious.

Symptoms may appear up to two weeks after exposure to COVID-19, but usually around Day Five.





Feeling breathless can be a sign of a more serious coronavirus infection, so it is important to consult a doctor and do not delay getting help.

### Why do people believe this rumour?

This is a common rumour that has been recorded in many contexts since the beginning of the pandemic as well as being a regular feature in rumour data collected around the world.

As COVID-19 is a new disease, with rapidly evolving science, the community looks for something familiar. This rumour is prevalent because it helps the community to ground the illness in their own reality, as something common, familiar, treatable, rather than a new condition with many as yet unanswered questions.

## SYMPTOMS TO WATCH

Symptoms		COVID-19	FLU	COLD
	Fever- 37.8C or above	Common	Common	Rare
	Cough	Common (dry)	Common	Mild
	Loss of taste/ smell	Common	Rare	Sometimes
	Fatigue	Sometimes	Common	Sometimes
	Headaches	Sometimes	Common	Rare
	Aches and pains	Sometimes	Common	Common
	Runny/ stuffy nose	Rare	Sometimes	Common
	Sore throat	Sometimes	Sometimes	Common
	Sneezing	No	No	Common
	Shortness of breath	Sometimes	No	No
	Diarrhea	Sometimes in children	Sometimes in children	No



# RUMOR BULLETIN

*There is no COVID-19 testing available for suspected cases, but only for those planning to travel.*



Internews highlighted this query to the Sudanese Ministry of Health who responded with a comprehensive list of all operating testing centres. The lists shows that rumours suggesting that testing centers have closed are false.

STATE	COVID-19 TESTING LOCATIONS
<b>Khartoum State</b> 	National Public Health Laboratory, Khartoum Al-Shahid Abd-al-Muiz Ataya Molecular Biology Laboratory, Khartoum Central Laboratory for Higher Education, Khartoum The Institute of Endemic Diseases Laboratory, Faculty of Medicine, University of Khartoum Fidail Private Hospital Laboratory, Khartoum Royal Care Hospital Laboratory, Khartoum Test Laboratory, Khartoum Al-Borg Medical Laboratories, Khartoum Al-Shahida Dr Salma Laboratory for Kidney Diseases, Khartoum Aliaa Hospital Laboratory, Omdurman Central Laboratory for Medical Corps, Omdurman
<b>Red Sea State</b> 	Central Laboratory, Port Sudan
<b>Kassala State</b> 	Public Health Laboratory, Kassala Tuberculosis Reference Laboratory, Kassala
<b>Al-Gedaref State</b> 	Al-Gedaref Regional Laboratory for Endemic Diseases, Gedref
<b>Al-Jazira State</b> 	Laboratory of the Blue Nile Institute for Communicable Diseases, Wad-Madani
<b>River Nile State</b> 	Public Health Laboratory, Atbara Tuberculosis Reference Laboratory, Atbara
<b>South Darfur State</b> 	Public Health Laboratory, Nyala
<b>North Darfur State</b> 	Tuberculosis Reference Laboratory, Al-Fashir
<b>White Nile State</b> 	Rabak Hospital Laboratory, Rabak
<b>Northern State</b> 	Central Laboratory, Dongola
<b>Sennar State</b> 	The General Administration of Blood Banks and Laboratories - Regional Reference Laboratory for Tuberculosis, Sennar

## WHAT ARE RUMORS?

Rumors are currently circulating stories or reports of uncertain or doubtful truth collected from first-hand sources within the community which could take the shape of a question, criticism, or general comments on a situation or topic. We should also note that rumors can be confusing because they might have some element of truth in them.



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## WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING

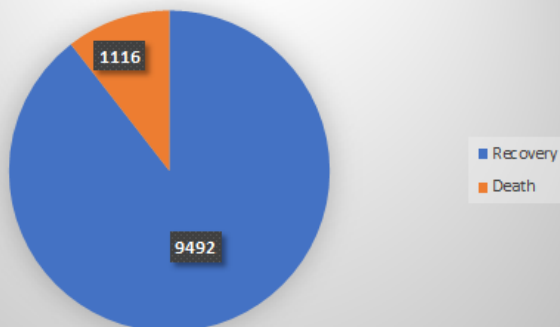
*"For now I think the lockdown is coming. But is it to counter a COVID-19 second wave or a wave of anger coming from the people?"*

The Sudanese Council of Ministers released an [official statement](#) on 1 November denying rumors of another lockdown, noting that the "High Committee for Health Emergencies is the only authority determining decisions and procedures related to the pandemic...and this authority has not issued any new verdicts".

People across the globe have levelled accusations that lockdown measures are politically motivated. Protesters have taken to the streets in violent anti-lockdown demonstrations in [Australia](#), [United Kingdom](#), [Greece](#), [Spain](#) and [Italy](#). Mistrust of government lockdown measures are in part due the spread of conflicting information on the virus during the COVID-19 pandemic. But also fuelled by a trend towards mistrust of governments in the midst of widespread social change and economic hardship worldwide.

**Recommendations:** Humanitarian organizations should focus on engaging communities with fact-based responses to their concerns. They should also support the government capacity to engage in two-way dialogue to dispel lockdown mistrust. [Gregory Poland](#), director of the Vaccine Research Group at the Mayo Clinic (Rochester, Minnesota, USA) explained the impact of early measures: "The speed of China's response was the crucial factor... they moved very quickly to stop transmission. Other countries, even though they had much longer to prepare for the arrival of the virus, delayed their response and that meant they lost control".

## THE REALITY OF COVID-19 IN SUDAN



COVID-19 recovery figures from the Sudanese Ministry of Health, 8 November 2020

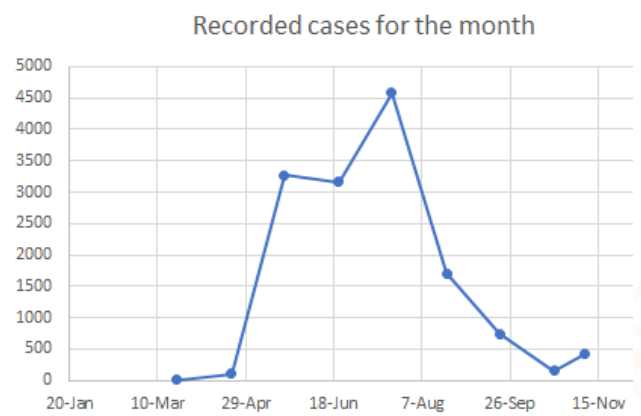
## ONLY CELEBRITIES?

*"The results came out very quickly, and how come we haven't contracted COVID-19? Our lives are never empty of crowds of people and [bread and gas] queues, or is it only high-level personalities that become infected with COVID-19?" Female -Facebook*

COVID-19 is a virus that affects all people and is not restricted to particular social groups, ethnicities, religions, age groups or genders. High profile individuals are more likely to report contracting the illness due to more regular access to testing. They may also be more exposed to the virus due to regular travel and attendance of social functions.

**Recommendations:** Awareness raising campaigns need to highlight this point.

## MONTHLY COVID-19 CASES IN SUDAN



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Please contact Internews' Humanitarian Liaison Officer Amira Galal ([agalal@internews.org](mailto:agalal@internews.org)) for further information.



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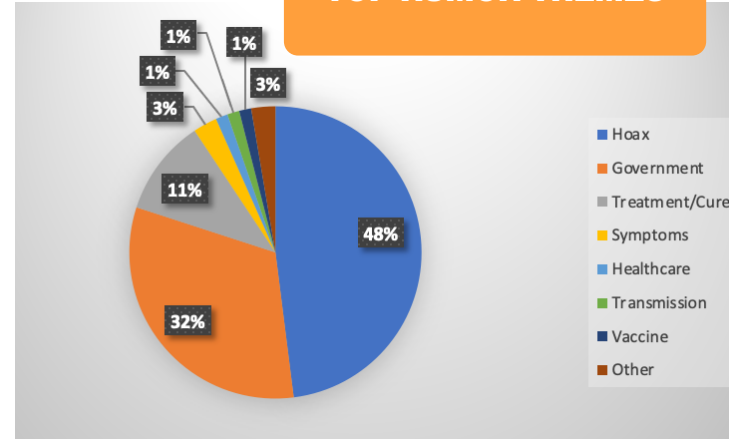
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## WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING

**“This is COVID-19, you have to take Aspirin 100 a day, it helps against blood clots. Drink warm things. If you have elderly people, they should take aspirin daily, and God protects the worshipers.” Female -Facebook**

Doctors treating COVID-19 have observed that low-level doses of Aspirin may be effective in treating some patients who are prone to blood clots. Clinical trials were launched in the UK on 6 November. Until scientists are able to verify whether this treatment is effective, patients should consult with a physician before taking any type of pharmaceutical or non-pharmaceutical remedy for suspected symptoms of COVID-19. This is important because large doses of Aspirin may temporarily- and even permanently- reduce kidney function. People who already have kidney, or other health problems such as liver disease or severe heart failure, should not use aspirin without speaking to their doctor. Aspirin is not a cure for COVID-19.

## TOP RUMOR THEMES



*Thematic breakdown of 75 COVID-19 social media rumors collected between 23 October and 5 November, 2020.*

## HOW CAN HUMANITARIAN ACTORS HELP?

The different symptoms of COVID-19, flu and colds need to be highlighted in awareness raising initiatives by humanitarian organisations and authorities to dispel misconceptions. This is important as people are unlikely to observe preventive measures if they assume that they just have a cold or normal flu.

Humanitarian organizations and community workers could promote wider access to information on the availability of testing capacities and their location. Partners may consider establishing listening groups to understand the difficulties experienced by in accessing these testing centers. It is especially relevant to enquire about the obstacles experienced by different groups when trying to access testing facilities, particularly vulnerable groups. Sharing the findings of these concerns and obstacles with national and local health authorities may help identify gaps in testing capacities and support the work of public health officials in expanding testing services to reach a wide range of people.

Humanitarian actors could identify health professionals, community healers and outreach workers to reinforce messages about preventative through them and have a more contextually-sensitive understanding of the differences between COVID-19 and flu.

Humanitarians can support awareness raising initiatives such as street theatre, mobile radio activities and community engagement discussions, as well as sensitizing community elders and influencers on public health messages and initiating discussions on COVID-19 misconceptions and debunking rumors, while persuading community members to apply the protective measures.



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