

Media Bulletin #6


January 2021



The new COVID-19 variants caused panic around the world, and the media reacted quickly to the new developments. News updates and analyses were reported in abundance. With the vast amounts of information, journalists must report news and events without distortion, misleading or falsification. Journalists are morally and professionally obligated to attribute words and actions to known sources, while there are few exceptions to protect sources. Journalists should be careful on how they place information and images taking into consideration the context and sequence of events.

For more, please refer to [Bahrain's Journalistic Honor Charter](#).

The New Variants – Fears and Rumors



In Sudan, people on social media addressed the topic of new variants in different ways. The safety of vaccines and the ability of the least developed countries to obtain the vaccines are the subject of discussions, as well as rumors and many questions about the side effects and effectiveness of vaccines. A Sudanese woman posted on Facebook: *"Sudan has discovered a fourth variant of the Corona family."*



In Sudan, the Rooted in Trust (RiT) project aims to mitigate and disrupt misinformation about COVID-19 by collecting and analyzing rumors on the Sudanese social media space. This bulletin is based on an analysis of 528 rumors collected in Arabic between 18 December and 12 January 2021, from Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram.

The New Variants – Fears and Rumors

After the discovery of a new COVID-19 variant in Britain and other countries, the debate continued to intensify about reports of new variants from around the world. The Coronavirus undergoes genetic mutations at an accelerated rate, and there are many questions in search of answers regarding the new variants, for example: "Has the Coronavirus become more deadly under its new versions? Currently, there is no evidence for that, despite what is needed in terms of monitoring and follow-up.

While others are asking: "Are the vaccines effective in protecting us from the new COVID-19 variants?" Yes, with a lot of assurance, or at least for now. The three leading vaccines provide a protective wall against the [new COVID-19 variants](#).

Virus mutations are normal, and some of the important mutations reported so far are associated with an increase in the virus' transmissibility but do not affect the severity of the disease.



Useful Contacts

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Sources and References for Journalists

Explain to the public clearly what is known and still unknown about vaccines, explain the process of producing vaccines and bring the image closer to the minds of the recipient

with

proverbs, comparisons, and through the use of simplified language. For more information:

[Guideline-How to report on vaccines-Arabic-Final-template.pdf](#)

[How do Vaccines Work](#)

Journalists must convey the truth honestly, fairly and accurately when reviewing journalistic content before publication. For more see:

<https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/article/4729>

<https://www.who.int/ar/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

The Facts

It is not true that a fourth variant of COVID-19 was discovered in Sudan, and the new variants are not out of control. Globally, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, dispelled the concerns associated with the new variants, stating at the WHO's COVID-19 briefing on 11 January 2021: "At present, it does not seem that the mutated variants indicate an increase in the severity of the disease."

On 21 December 2020, Michael Ryan, Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Program, explained that although the new COVID-19 variant in the UK is spreading faster, "it is not out of control." While the German Minister of Health elaborated: "Based on everything we know until now, and after meetings between experts of the European authorities, there is no effect of the new variant on vaccines, which still remain effective."

Ibrahim Hassan Cogan, a well-known Sudanese surgeon based in the UK, wrote on his Facebook page more than once about the new UK variant, in response to questions from Sudanese in various parts of the world. On the new UK variant, Cogan argues: "The new COVID-19 virus does not differ in its protein make-up from the old virus." His words echo the statements of other medical experts that the COVID-19 vaccines may respond effectively to the new variant, and that "there should be no fear."

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that the UK and South Africa variants seem to spread more easily and quickly than other variants, which may lead to more cases of COVID-19. Currently, there is no evidence that these variants cause more severe illness or increased risk of death. However, an increase in the number of cases will put more strain on health care resources, lead to more hospitalizations, and potentially more deaths.

Corona vaccines – Fierce Rumor Campaign

Social media users in Sudan circulated rumors in Arabic and sometimes in English saying that COVID-19 vaccines do not provide any protection from the virus. One person tweeted: *"The vaccine does not provide protection nor treatment, even after you take it, you remain obligated to wear your mask, physical distance and wash your hands."* On Facebook, another expressed doubts about the safety and quality of the vaccine: *"This.. vaccine is ineffective"*, while a woman on Facebook posted, *"The vaccines are not tested and do not have documented safety certificates. In the future, the body will be deprived of its own immunity, and thus any disease, no matter how trivial, a reason to kill its owner, and whoever disagrees with this opinion let him get the vaccine without regret."*

The Facts

Comments circulated on social media about the ineffectiveness of the vaccines and skepticism about safety is incorrect and not based on any scientific references. Vaccines that have obtained the approval of the World Health Organization have undergone strict clinical tests and trials to ensure that they are safe and effective in controlling the disease. For more information:

[What you need to know about COVID-19 vaccines | UNICEF](#)

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, has also clarified: "Vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics have been developed and rolled out, at record speed, thanks to collaborations including the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator. Vaccines offer great hope to turn the side of the pandemic."

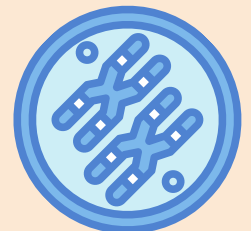
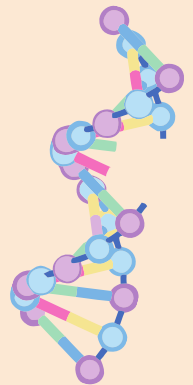
Vaccines Do Not Alter our DNA

Globally, a wave of anti-vaccine rumors has exploded, amongst the rumors circulating on social media is that vaccines contain small robots or chips—allegedly set-up by technology mogul Bill Gates—to record information and can change a vaccinated person's DNA.

The [BBC](#) investigation team has also commented on this rumor, highlighting: "There is no evidence to support these allegations, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has confirmed to the BBC that they are not true."

"Vaccines do not alter a person's DNA," said the Agence France-Presse (AFP) health investigating service, and that "there is no truth to news about Bill Gates' plan to implant chips that collect information from those receiving the vaccine."

[AFP](#) has taken a special interest in verifying the authenticity of news since its inception more than 180 years ago, and is a great source for verifying rumors and fake news.



Please contact Internews' Media Liaison Officer Hassan Ahmed Berkia (hberkia@internews.org) for support and further information.