

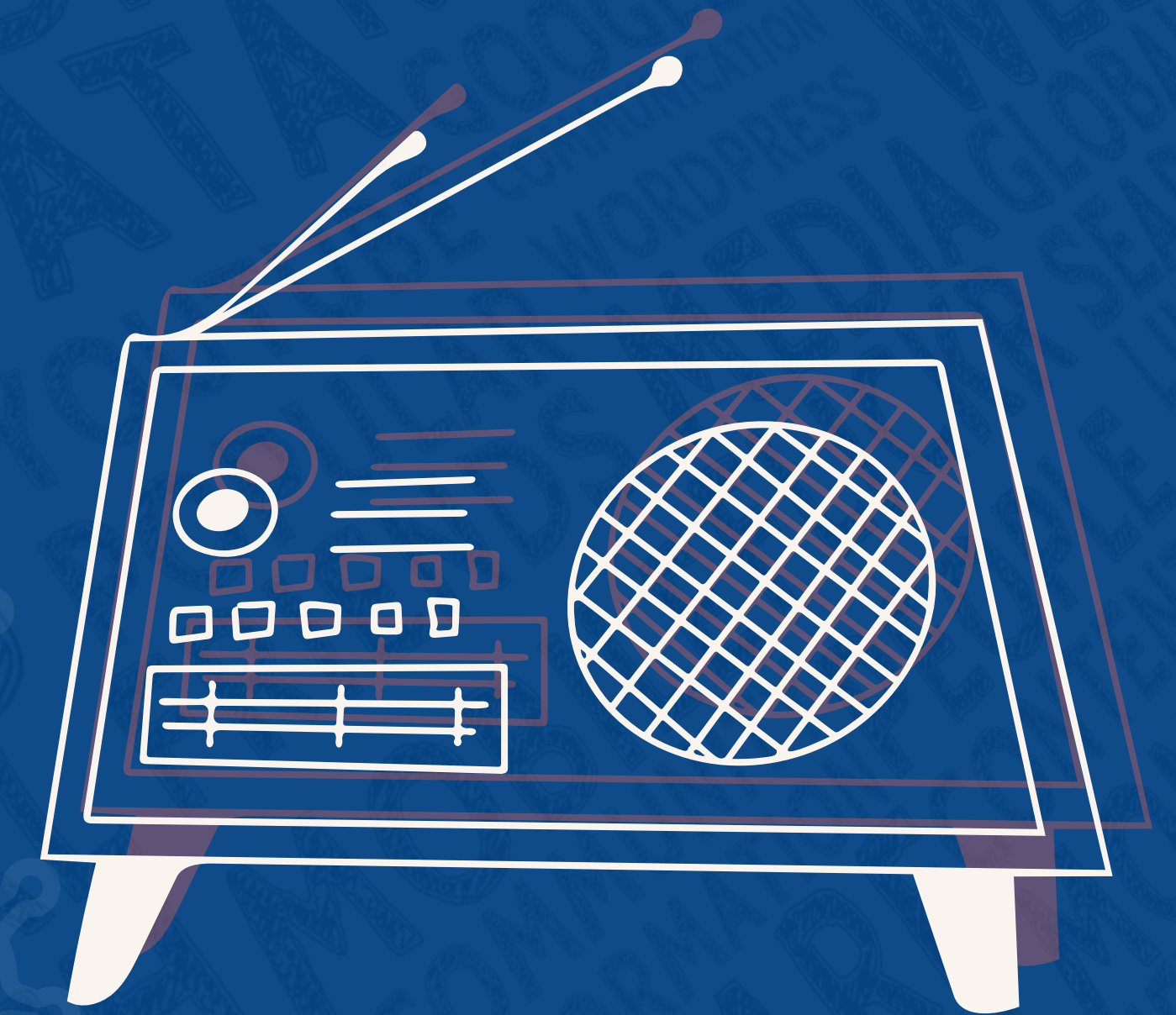
MEDIA#4 BULLETIN

LEBANON - June 2022

ROOTED IN TRUST 2.0

Maharat has prepared this media bulletin in cooperation with Internews as part of the Rooted in Trust 2.0 project.

Maharat's team of social media monitors continues to collect rumors linked to COVID-19 on various Lebanese platforms. These rumor trends are then analyzed and fact-checked by the Maharat News team.



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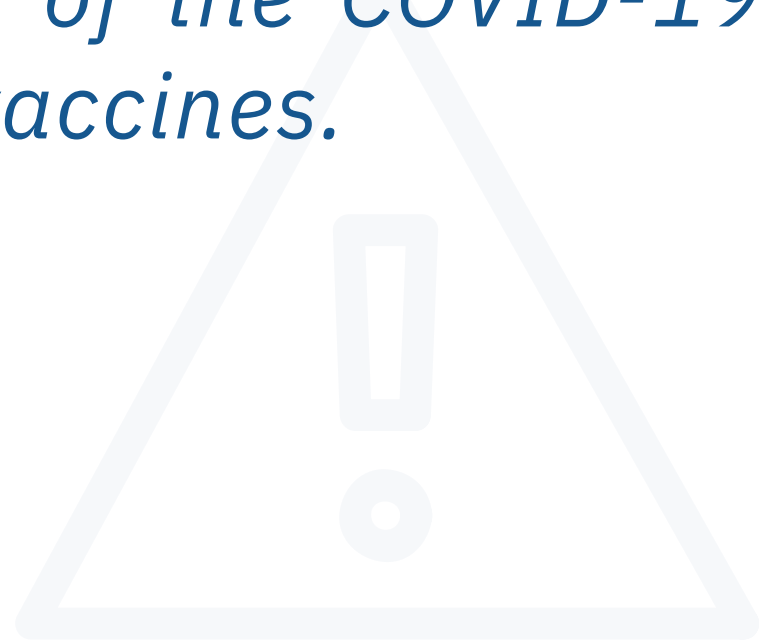
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What are the people saying?

RUMOR #1

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The recently circulating hepatitis virus is another side effect of the COVID-19 virus and vaccines.



The News posted on the Website

The "Lebanon Pulse" website published an article on April 24th, 2022, stating that a mysterious outbreak of hepatitis infection began to spread across the European continent and the United States, affecting mainly children, as well as dozens of hepatitis infections were recorded in the United Kingdom.

In the title of the article, the site questioned: "A mysterious virus is spreading among children... Is it related to Covid-19?"

What are the effects and risks of this rumor?

Without scientific verification and health studies from experts and international organizations, believing this rumor may lead to **major panic among parents** who might fear from future hepatitis infections among their vaccinated children. In addition, the children **might be at a physical risk** if they resort to taking unnecessary or inaccurate medical solutions, without medical consultations.





THE FACTS

- On April 21st, 2022, the British newspaper "The Sun" reported a major outbreak of hepatitis disease among children in the United Kingdom, with 108 cases that have been discovered and recorded until current days.
- The article added that the 108 cases of hepatitis mainly appeared among children, particularly under 10 years old, between January and April 2022.
- Eight children required a liver transplant, which is a rare case since children rarely develop acute hepatitis according to health experts. Of the confirmed cases, 79 are recorded in England, 14 in Scotland, and the rest in Wales and Northern Ireland.
- In fact, signs of hepatitis virus infection include dark urine, itchy skin, yellowing of the eyes and skin (jaundice), muscle and joint pain, high temperature and feeling sick.
- By extension, The World Health Organization reported on the 23rd of April 2022, that as of 21st of April, at least 169 cases of acute hepatitis of unknown origin have been reported from 11 countries in the WHO European Region: Cases have been reported in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland (UK) (114), Spain (13), Israel (12), the United States of America (9), Denmark (6), Ireland (<5), the Netherlands (4), Italy (4), Norway (2), France (2), Romania (1), and Belgium (1).
- In addition, the WHO and European Center for Disease Control and Prevention support countries in ongoing investigations and gathering data from multiple countries that have reported cases of hepatitis.
- Across this context, The World Health Organization is closely monitoring the situation and working with health authorities in the UK, other member states and partners to better understand the nature of the virus.
- As for the relationship of the virus to the Covid-19 vaccines and pandemic, the WHO stated that this virus needs further investigation, as the assumptions that the virus is a side effect of the Covid-19 vaccines is not currently supported nor confirmed because the vast majority of infected children did not receive the Covid-19 vaccines. According to "The Sun" newspaper, experts ruled out all probabilities that the virus was related in any way to the Covid-19 virus or vaccines.
- Nevertheless, it is important to note that the World Health Organization confirms that the Hepatitis virus is non-related to any side effects of the Covid-19 vaccines.

TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS



- Do not consider nor rely on any news or health analysis from media outlets as primary sources without referring to approved studies and scientific facts.
- Rely on medical studies conducted by international health organizations and experts in the field regarding any updates on Covid-19 vaccines and side effects.
- Fact-check all information or discoveries on Covid-19 topics from reliable sources.
- Monitor on a day-by-day basis the latest updates, statistics, and studies happening within the health sector, particularly issues related to Covid-19.

MEDIA PRINCIPLES



- Journalists should always double-check and verify the latest updates issuing the side effects of the Covid-19 virus and vaccines with health care professionals and international health organizations.
- In addition, journalists should keep on tracking the latest viruses and diseases spreading around the world while providing the full picture from their origin, to their symptoms and cure.

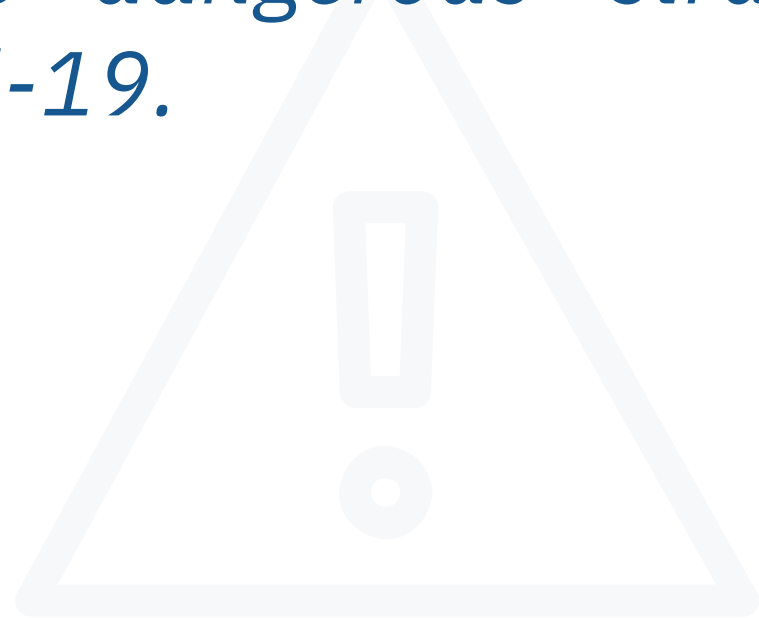


What are the people saying?

RUMOR #2

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The Covid- 19 vaccines are ineffective in front of the future dangerous strain of Covid-19.



The News posted on the Website

“Lebanon now” published a news article in which it referred to the warning of the Director of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, that the threat of the emergence of a new, more dangerous strain of Covid-19, whereby the current vaccines will be ineffective, is real, which led to a wave of panic and fear among its readers and followers.

What are the effects and risks of this rumor?

Believing the claim that Covid-19 vaccines cannot protect its recipients from the new strains of this virus without scientific proof and validation will lead to **major panic among the people** who might resort to taking inaccurate medical solutions or to get vaccinated again without medical consultations. There is no official data confirming new Covid variants or the effectiveness of Covid-19 vaccines against future strains.





THE FACTS

- WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, during the opening remarks to the GLOBSEC Bratislava Forum on the 3rd of June 2022, noted, according to the WHO website statement, that "it is still too early to say that the epidemic is over. It is not over yet." He added that the situation is still serious, due to the increased transmission of Covid-19 and the decline in PCR tests, and millions of people are still not immunized and/or vaccinated. Therefore, there is still a real and present risk of the emergence of a new, more dangerous variant that can evade vaccines.
- Ghebreyesus explained that it is very difficult to predict how Covid will develop and said, "We know for sure that future strains must be more transmissible than current ones to overcome them. But we cannot predict how dangerous they will be, so we must remain alert and cautious."
- However, Ghebreyesus, reassured the world that whatever the next scenario may be, we are in a much better position than we were before when the pandemic began. "Of course, there is progress. We know the virus better, and we have the tools to prevent, detect and treat it. We can quickly recalibrate these tools if necessary."
- Therefore, what Lebanon Now indicated is incorrect in terms of aiding in spreading the rumor that Covid-19 vaccines "will be ineffective" with future Covid strains, yet the Director of the World Health Organization while expecting the emergence of new, more virulent variables, he highlighted on the fact that the vaccines "might be ineffective" while reassuring that health care centers and actors are in a better position in terms of new vaccines productions against new strains, which does not call for panic, but caution and alertness to future global pandemics.

TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS



- Verify and fact-check all updates on Covid vaccines effectiveness and new strains while providing the complete information as confirmed by health care professionals and actors.
- Restrain in using and/or publishing misleading headlines on any health subject to reduce and limit future mental and physical risks among the public.
- Rely on scientific studies conducted by international health institutions and organizations regarding any data or updates on new Covid strains.
- Always differentiate between new COVID-19 strains and other emerging viruses such as Monkeypox, by explaining the differences in detail, so that the general public does not confuse them

MEDIA PRINCIPLES



- Journalists should stay up to date on any health subject related to Covid-19 vaccines and future potentials strains. In fact, it is a must to double-check all information through their communication channels with health care experts and professionals to validate all data on new discoveries correlated to Covid vaccines effectiveness in the long run.
- In addition, Journalists should adopt clear fact-checking strategies by relying on competent international health organizations to limit the spread of misinformation on Covid data-related.



Sources

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