

# MEDIA#5 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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# What are the people saying?

## RUMOR #1

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*There is no need to be afraid nor worried of the monkeypox virus and its spread in Lebanon, as claimed by the Ministry of Public Health itself*



The claim shared on Twitter

One of the pioneers on social media networking sites tweeted, via his account, that the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health announced and reported on the first case of monkeypox in Lebanon, stressing that there is no need to panic and that the monkeypox virus is not a pandemic or an outbreak as Covid 19, which received intensive interactions from his followers.

Lebanese petrochemical engineer Khaddaj Marwan, who exceeds his number of followers 14.6K on Twitter, wrote a tweet in which he reported the first case of monkeypox in Lebanon by saying: “First Monkeypox case reported in Lebanon, Head of the Preventive Medicine Department at the Ministry of Public Health: There is no need to be afraid or anxious. Monkey Pox is not similar to the Covid outbreak, transmission of infection requires direct and long-term contact with the patient.”

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## What are the effects and risks of this rumor?

Without scientific verification, believing this rumor may lead to negligence among citizens, who might disregard the urgency in taking the necessary precautions towards the Monkeypox virus. In addition, the people might be at a physical risk if they didn't resort to taking and applying the required measurements when diagnosed with Monkey Pox, due to their underestimation of the situation.

## THE FACTS

- In an official statement, the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health had announced the registration of the first monkeypox case in Lebanon on June 20, 2022. The ministry added that: "The case came from abroad and is currently following the required isolation, and her condition is stable from a medical point of view. The ministry is also following up on identifying and following up on close contacts with the recorded case."
- The Ministry of Public Health stated that Monkeypox is transmitted to humans through a virus, "either from an animal to human through contact with infected animals (rodents or monkeys) in countries where the virus is dominating in sub-Saharan African countries (Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kinshasa, Cameroon). and Central African Republic...) or from human to human through direct contact through skin, touching and saliva, sexual contact, or indirectly through contaminated objects, particularly bed sheets."
- In addition, the ministry asked the public to take the following preventive measures: "to adhere to a safe distance with infected people, not to share their personal items, not to come into contact with animals in the countries where the disease is spreading, and to avoid eating wild animal meat."



## THE FACTS

- In this context, the World Health Organization confirmed in a statement entitled “Monkeypox outbreaks in several countries: an update of the situation” that the confirmation of one case of monkeypox, in a country, is considered an outbreak of the disease. The unexpected appearance of monkeypox in several regions in the initial absence of epidemiological links to regions where monkeypox was historically reported, suggests that there may have been an undetected transmission of this virus for some time.
- Therefore, what was published by Marwan on his Twitter account is partially true, as it is correct that the Ministry of Public Health officially reported the registration of the first monkeypox case in Lebanon, yet it did not mention in its statement the urgency that the World Health Organization announced, in the event that only one case of monkeypox that is recorded in any country should be considered as an outbreak of the disease, whereby precautions should be taken and applied.
- Nevertheless, to ensure that your information is correct and accurate, always visit the official health websites directly concerned with following up on global diseases and epidemics, providing the necessary medical instructions, such as the website of the World Health Organization and the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health.

## TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS



- Do not share any statement addressed by local ministries on health topics without referring to and fact-checking the accuracy of the information from international organizations.
- Maintain the necessary informative balance between the latest updates stated by global health organizations on new emerging diseases with the health and societal status quo of the country.
- Consider scientific and medical studies and communiques conducted by international health organizations regarding any updates on Monkeypox cases as your primary sources while double-checking this information with health care professionals.
- Restrain in using and/or publishing misleading headlines on any health subject to reduce and limit future confusion as well as mental and physical risks among the public.
- Remain transparent about what you do not know or not sure of while maintaining a risk-averse approach in media health reporting

## MEDIA PRINCIPLES



- Journalists should always refer to the latest statements declared by the global health organizations regarding any updates on concurrent and new diseases around the world, within a specific media framework that ensures the spread of accurate data to the audience.
- Furthermore, journalists should fact-check and verify the latest standards, measurements and precautions that should be taken within the spread of any viruses as the monkeypox.



# What are the people saying?

## RUMOR #2

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While the New Covid-19 variants have limited and not severe symptoms on its recipients, however, it does negatively affect the psychological and nervous system of the patient



The claim shared on Facebook

In a post on his Facebook account, the citizen Hassan Bazzi advised health researchers and doctors to delve deeper into the symptoms of the Covid-19 new variants on the nervous and psychological system.

He added: "The new strains may be less harmful in terms of pain, body temperature and shortness of breath, and thank God it is not fatal, according to the indicated and recorded numbers, however the psychological effects of this variant are devastating. You will miss out on everything."

## What are the effects and risks of this rumor?

People who already have pre-existing mental health conditions and do get COVID-19 might also be stigmatized further especially when believing the claim that new Covid-19 variants has harmful effects on both the psychological and nervous systems.

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# THE FACTS

## *In terms of the nervous system*

- In an interview with the World Health Organization with Dr. Janet Diaz on March 4th, 2022 in the “Science in 5” program, Diaz said that one of the three common symptoms after recovering from Covid-19 is cognitive impairment or brain fog, meaning that people have trouble paying attention, trouble concentrating, lack in remembering or short term memory, and/or having trouble in sleeping.
- According to one British study, about a third of patients who had symptoms of Covid-19 and were hospitalized, felt that they had recovered after a year, yet still had impaired physical and cognitive functions.
- The researchers published, in the journal "clinical medicine", tests conducted for 46 patients, 6 months after their admission to the hospital, and the results of the examinations were compared with 460 people who had not previously had Covid-19. The results indicated that those who were hospitalized with COVID-19 had certain cognitive problems.
- One of the study participants, Dr. David Menon, said that investigating cognitive decline in COVID-19 patients helps not only patients but also those who have experienced similar problems after other illnesses.
- Researchers are monitoring the effects of COVID-19 on the nervous system to see how this virus leads to these persistent symptoms in some individuals. These effects include problems concentrating, sleep disturbances, fluctuating heart rates, and muscles and joints pain.



## THE FACTS (Continued)

### *In terms of mental health*

- The magazine "the lancet" published a research that reveals the toll that the infection with the Covid-19 virus can cause on mental health, and the study included 69.8 million patients in the United States, and it was found that 20% of people infected with Covid-19 suffer from mental disorders, including Anxiety, depression or insomnia.
- According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which represents 18,000 psychiatrists in the UK, the lockdown measures have increased loneliness, isolation, restlessness and anxiety, with millions of people quickly forced to adapt to new realities and make drastic lifestyle changes.
- Researchers at the University of Oxford Medical Research (NIHR) found that people with a preexisting mental disorder were 65% more likely contract to COVID-19.
- Within this context, the National Center for Biotechnology Information published a study that indicated that public health measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic and stress related to the epidemic, contributed to emotional distress, especially depression and anxiety.

Interventions such as quarantine and conflicting public health messages have exacerbated the psychological crisis of the society especially among vulnerable groups of the population.

- In another WHO interview with Dr. Janet Diaz on July 30th, 2021, Diaz said that about 200 symptoms of the Covid-19 have been reported, including anxiety, depression and other psychological problems. She added that studies are still ongoing for a greater understanding of the correlation between infections and these long-term symptoms.
- On the other hand, The GAVI Foundation, the international co-leader of the covax platform responsible for the equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines around the world, said that although the link between epidemics and mental health is well documented and well-studied, there is still more research needed to understand the full scope of its causes and solutions. Scientists are still studying how COVID-19 affects the brain and nervous system.

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Therefore, what was published is partially correct, Covid-19 variants affect the psychological, nervous system and mental health. Yet studies are still in place to understand the multiple causes and provide the appropriate solutions.





## TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS



- Verify all updates on Covid-19 long-term symptoms and their effects on both the physical and mental health among patients.
- Fact check the misinformation and rumors while relying on accurate health studies and the health experts' medical and scientific facts.
- Contextualize every rumor based on the information included before fact-checking to provide the full picture and facts that it might carry.
- Rephrase the news headlines that cover any health subject to reduce and limit the spread of panic and fear among the public.
- Avoid fueling stigma around already vulnerable population groups such as those suffering from serious mental health conditions.

## MEDIA PRINCIPLES



- Journalists should always build communication channels with health care actors and professionals to verify the latest data issuing the Covid-19 long-term symptoms and effects.
- In addition, journalists should focus and balance their research and analyses on both the mental and physical health aspects of any pandemic and diseases.



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