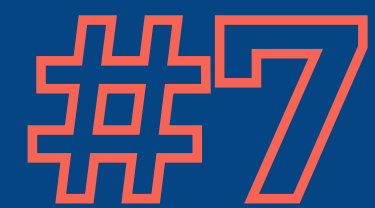


MEDIA BULLETIN



LEBANON - August 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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The governmental hospital, Rafiq Hariri hospital, designated an isolation unit specific for monkeypox cases that reached almost 20 cases in Lebanon



The claim shared on Twitter

“500” website published a picture showing a banner stating, "Monkeypox isolation unit." The leaflet was accompanied by information claiming that the sign was placed in front of the Rafic Hariri Governmental Hospital, which had designated an isolation unit, explaining that while monkeypox recorded "a relatively wide spread in Europe, confirmed and suspected cases in Lebanon did not exceed twenty."

The photo shared on the website sparked a wave of responses, some of them sarcastic and others fearful of the spread of this epidemic.

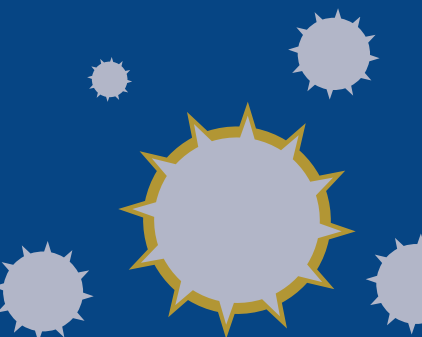
What are the effects and risks of this rumor?

Without scientific and logistical verification, believing this rumor may lead to **negligence among citizens**, who might disregard the spread of the monkeypox and the urgency in taking the necessary precautions towards this virus, regardless of the number of cases in Lebanon. In addition, the people, underestimating the situation, might be at a **physical risk** if they didn't resort to taking and applying the required measurements before and after being diagnosed with monkeypox.



THE FACTS

- The Director of Electronic Health at the Ministry of Public Health, Lina Abu Mourad, confirmed in an interview with "Maharat News" that a special unit has been allocated for people infected with monkeypox virus at Rafic Hariri Governmental Hospital, and what is being circulated is correct.
- With regard to the number of monkeypox infections, the head of the Prevention Department in the Ministry of Public Health, Dr. Atika Berri, explained in an exclusive interview with "Maharat News" that "in the last statement circulated by the Ministry of Public Health, announcing that 21 cases were reported, which sparked fear and panic among the citizens, were not recorded cases in one single day, yet the cumulative of cases since the beginning of the registration of monkeypox infections in Lebanon until the day that the statement started circulating."
- Berri added that this number has been exceeded, as it exceeds 21 cases, but these cases are not all confirmed, as there are some suspected cases that are being examined and yet to be confirmed. Berri said, "Out of the dozens of recorded cases, there are 6 confirmed cases of monkeypox, and the other cases are being followed up and examined," explaining, "There are now no definitive numbers in this regard, but it is definitely more than 20."
- Additionally, because there is not enough equipments available for testing for monkeypox, cases are collected and tested once or twice a week. During this period, suspected cases are isolated and followed up until the release of the laboratory results.
- The six confirmed cases are currently isolated in their homes, because there is no serious emergency that requires any follow-up in the hospital. They are contacted or through their relatives to check updates on their condition and follow up remotely.
- On the other hand, the epidemiological surveillance program at the Ministry of Public Health communicates with those close to the infected people within the same family, to ensure that the infection is not transmitted. So far, no infection has been recorded among the families of those who tested positive for monkeypox.





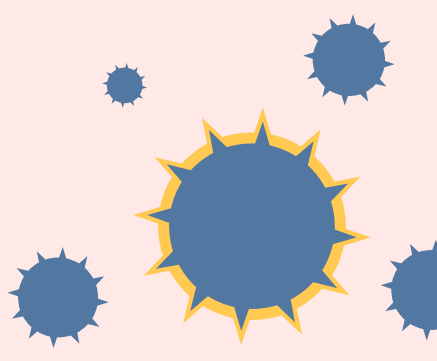
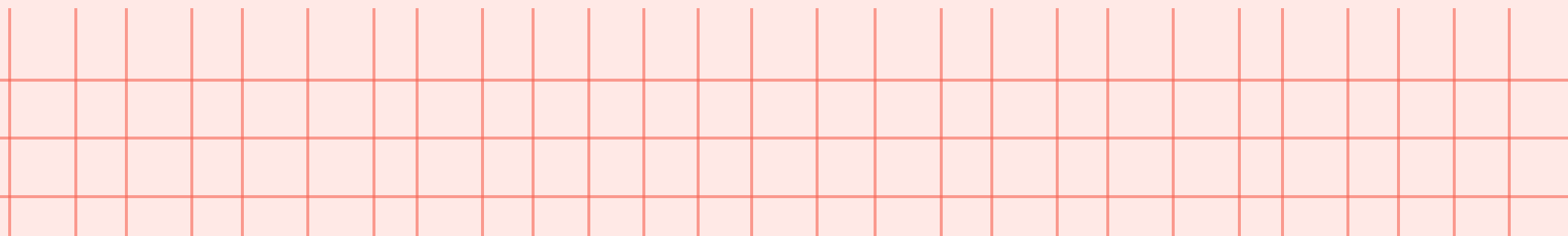
What about the isolation unit at Rafic Hariri Governmental Hospital?

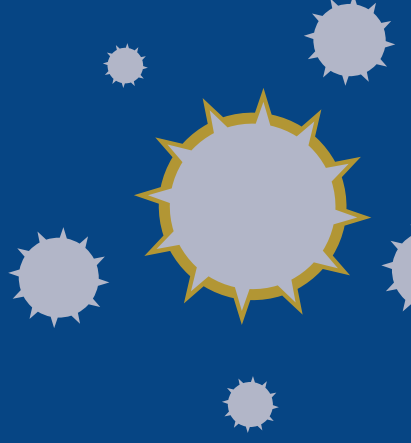
Berri explained that the role of the new isolation unit at the Rafic Hariri Governmental Hospital is to direct people who are suspected of being infected, or to register diagnosed cases in some university hospitals that have begun diagnosing some cases, or to conduct an examination to detect monkeypox and receiving the results. If it is confirmed that any patient is infected and needs close follow-up due to the deterioration of his condition, he/she is isolated in this unit. But so far, no one has been isolated in this unit.

What is the difference between the incubation period and the infection period?

The incubation period differs from the infection period, as the first extends from the moment the virus enters the body until symptoms appear. During this period, the person is not contagious within 2 to 3 weeks.

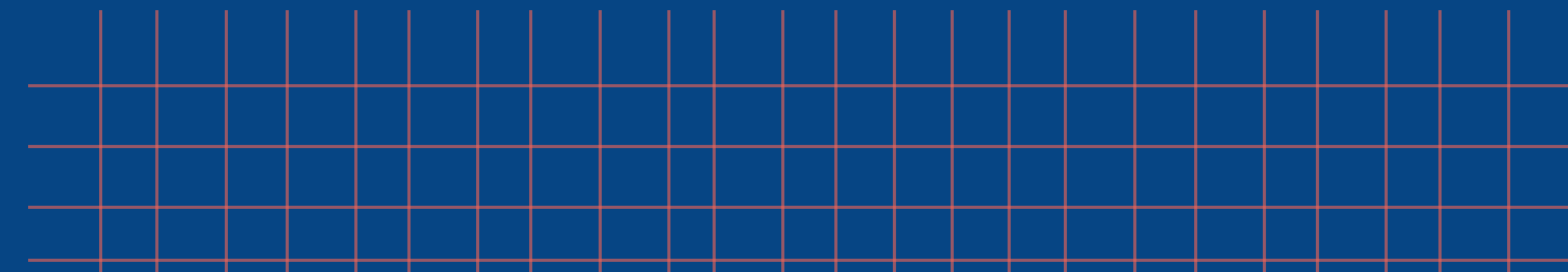
The infected individual enters the stage of infection and becomes contagious from the moment the symptoms starts appearing until complete recovery, and it may also range between two to three weeks.





Is there a confirmed cure for monkeypox?

- For cases of monkeypox, treatment is provided for the symptoms, not the disease itself. "If the patient's temperature rises, we give him fever-reducing medications, and if he feels pain, we give him analgesic medication according to the location of the pain," Berri explains.
- "The main objective of the isolation process is to prevent the transmission of the virus to more people, than to treat the patient him/herself ", she added.
- Therefore, what was published is partially true, as an isolation unit was allocated for monkeypox patients in Rafic Hariri Hospital, but the number of cases shared is inaccurate, because the number of confirmed cases until this date is 6, while the number of suspected cases exceeded the threshold of 21.
- To ensure the correctness of the published information regarding monkeypox, it is always recommended to visit the official health websites concerned with the follow-up and surveillance of epidemics and diseases, such as the website of the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, which closely follows the spread of cases in Lebanon.



TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS



- Do not share any statement addressed by websites on health topics without referring and fact-checking the accuracy of the information and data from the concerned local and international health organizations.
- Double check all the number of cases shared by any news website related to reported cases on monkeypox and other epidemic to reduce fear and panic among the readers and citizens.
- Provide the accurate information issuing the symptoms and measures taken of global epidemics as the monkeypox on the different logistical levels through relying on the data provided by health experts.
- Restrain in using misleading headlines on any health subject that might cause mental and physical risks among vulnerable groups.
- Remain transparent and offer all necessary information about global epidemics while maintaining a risk-averse approach in media health reporting.

MEDIA PRINCIPLES



- Journalists should always provide the latest updates and measurements that the ministry of public health has been taking to prevent the spread of epidemics like the monkeypox in Lebanon.
- In addition, fact-checking is always must in science and health reporting to ensure the spread of accurate information and numbers of confirmed and suspected cases to the local communities.



What are the people saying?

RUMOR #2

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No one knows who is controlling the Covid-19 virus, specifically that even when vaccinated, any individual can be diagnosed again with the same virus.



The claim shared on Facebook

On August 3rd, 2022, the "Lebanon 24" website published a statement by the head of the "Lebanese Medical Social Gathering" and the representative of the European Middle Eastern International Medical Association in Lebanon, Professor Raef Rida, who claimed that the increase in Covid-19 infections and mutations indicates that there are hidden subjects who created it and has been controlling its development all along. He also stated that the number of total deaths around the world exceeded 17 million.

In his statement, he asked: "Can people take the vaccines and get infected?", noting that it is a prelude to a "germ/virus warfare."

What are the effects and risks of this rumor?

People who have already been vaccinated and believed this rumor without scientific verification might **restrain from taking other necessary immunity boosters/vaccines** requested from health care experts, which in return might put them at **physical risk** if they got any other Covid-19 variants and/or disregarded the necessity of following the requested measurements in preventing and being fully immunized against this epidemic.

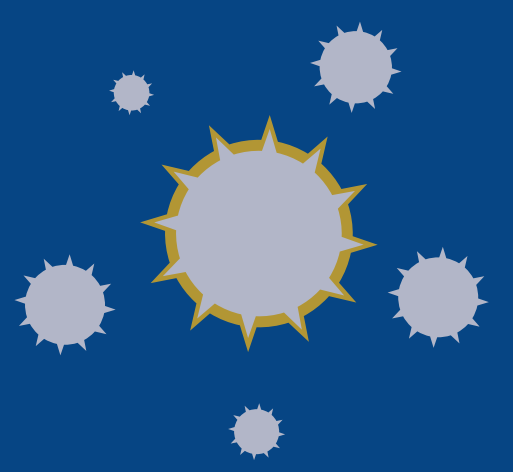
THE FACTS

In terms of the increase in mutations and cases

- All viruses, including COVID-19, change over time. Most changes have little or no effect on the characteristics of the virus.
- However, some changes may affect the characteristics of the virus, such as how easily it spreads, the severity of associated disease symptoms, the performance of vaccines, or the level of therapeutic drugs, diagnostic tools, or other public and social health measures.
- COVID-19 contains RNA as its genetic material. These viruses have a high mutation rate, meaning that they are able to produce mutants much higher than normal viruses, according to what official health centers such as the National Library of Medicine (NCBI) indicated.
- Stuart Ray, Vice President of Medicine for Data Safety and Analytics at Johns Hopkins Medicine, says: “The nature of RNA viruses such as the COVID-19 evolves and changes gradually, and this abundance of mutations is neither new nor unexpected, for example, the influenza viruses change a lot and that is why doctors recommend getting new influenza vaccines every year.”
- As long as COVID-19 continues to circulate in societies, it is likely that multiple mutants and/or strains will increase, says Ray.
- The organization considers that the continued transmission of infection creates new mutations for the virus, so the policy to fight the virus is based on limiting the transmission of COVID-19 in order to end the pandemic.
- Therefore, the World Health Organization, in cooperation with relevant partners, expert networks, national authorities, institutions and researchers, is continuously monitoring and evaluating the evolution of COVID-19 to understand how it spreads further and implement a policy to prevent this spread.
- As for the increase in infections, Dr. Maria Vanerhoff said in an interview with the World Health Organization, that there are some variants that spread more quickly, such as the "Omicron" variant, and thus lead to a higher number of infections. But the organization is ramping up its surveillance work around the world to better understand the virus, and the available vaccines remain the only effective way to prevent severe disease and death, including the ones against the Omicron variant.

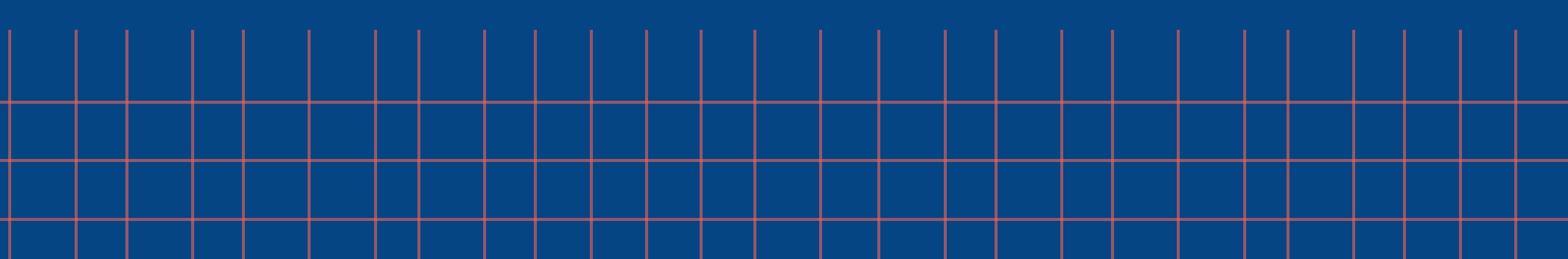


THE FACTS



In terms of being infected after being vaccinated

- In an interview with the World Health Organization, Dr. Catherine O'Brien said that the available vaccines offer 80 to 90% protection, but this does not mean that this is complete protection as there is no vaccine for any disease that provides 100% full protection.
- "There will be infections among people who have already received full vaccinations and certainly among some people who have partially received them. It does not mean that the vaccines do not work or that there is something wrong with the vaccines. Yet, this means that not everyone who receives the vaccines has 100 percent protection," she added. .
- In WHO's guidance on COVID-19 vaccines, it states that they provide at least some protection from infection and transmission, but not as much as they do against serious symptoms and death. In addition, She stresses that more evidence is needed to determine how successful it is in stopping infection and its transmission.
- Therefore, what was published by Dr. Raef Reda is incorrect and misleading and can seriously affect the community immunization process and the decrease of the COVID-19 pandemic. By extension, journalists must always rely on the official health centers such as the World Health Organization to verify any scientific updated on pandemics such as the COVID-19.



TIPS FOR JOURNALISTS



- Verify all updates on Covid-19 vaccines and the required doses that should be taken by each patient by relying on the latest studies published by the global health organizations.
- Fact-check all misinformation and rumors issuing health topics that can have direct effect on the immunization processes of local communities and any physical and/or mental risks on its recipients.
- Restrain from fueling stigma around the most vulnerable population groups particularly on topics issuing Covid-19's vaccination and immunization processes.
- Rely on official local and international health organization as your primary source of information and data issuing updates on pandemics.

MEDIA PRINCIPLES



- Journalist should always double check all information and data that they came across from news websites with health care actors and professionals before sharing them with the public.
- In addition, journalists should improve their skills in science and health reporting particularly when covering global epidemics through basing their work on the principles of fact-checking and data verification, particularly on health related topics.



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