

This summary of Media Bulletin, a report periodically produced under the Rooted in Trust Project (RiT 2.0), is designed for journalists and other stakeholders in Lebanon reporting and working on COVID-19 as well as other health-related issues and challenges. It shares a brief analysis of the tracked and fact-checked misinformation and rumors tackled in the Media Bulletins over the period of time extending between April and November 2022, and sheds light on important rumor trends to give insights on the changing landscape of related information needs.

NOVEMBER 2022

## SITUATION UPDATE OVERVIEW COVID-19, MONKEY POX, CHOLERA: FROM ONE CHALLENGE TO ANOTHER.

Lebanon's health sector witnessed over the passed year a rush of outbreaks, in parallel to the spread of the COVID-19 in its current phases. In fact, over the past 8 months, health care experts warned of multiple viruses approaching the Lebanese public and vulnerable communities, whereas, simultaneously, a significant spread of infodemic and misinformation pervaded the Lebanese media and information ecosystem in different social and political contexts.

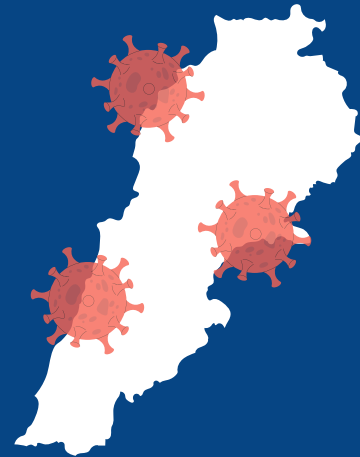
On Monday, June 20th, 2022, Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health reported on the first case of monkeypox virus. This health crisis was followed by an extensive range of rumors targeting the LGBTQIAs community in Lebanon, accusing them of spreading this virus across the country.

Likewise, in June 2022, HAV (Hepatitis A) cases demonstrated an outbreak re-emergence within Lebanon. According to the MOPH, 609 confirmed cases were reported in the North and Bekaa governates. This spread unleashed as well rumors indicating inaccurate medical treatments to those diagnosed with HAV, while putting serious physical risks upon the public.

On the 4th of October, 2022, the MOPH declared the outbreak of the cholera virus in Lebanon, with over 3042 suspected and confirmed cases, according to the OCHA. "Lebanon is vulnerable to cholera, and this is being aggravated by the prolonged economic situation and scarce access to clean water and proper sanitation services across the country," stated Dr Abdinasir Abubakar, WHO Representative in Lebanon. In fact, the social media platforms witnessed another wave of stereotypical rumors, targeting the Syrian refugees located in rural regions across Lebanon.

However, through the continuous media bulletins produced by Maharat Foundation, in partnership with Internews, within the Rooted in Trust Project, this report analyses the rumors landscape within the monitoring period extending between April and November 2022. The objective of this report aims on providing journalists with a detailed overview of the misinformation and rumors monitored, as a guiding toolkit representing the methodologies adopted and analysis of the data within the media and health sectors in Lebanon.

## OUTBREAKS DISTRIBUTION



**COVID-19** 1,122,146 Infections

Source: [Reuters](#), July 2022

**MONKEY POX** 20 Suspected  
12 Referral to RHUH  
12 Tested at RHUH  
4 Confirmed Cases

Source: [MOPH](#), July 2022

**HAV** 555 Reported Cases

Source: [Relief Web](#), July 2022

**CHOLERA** 2,421 suspected cases  
413 confirmed cases  
19 associated deaths

Source: RCCE meeting, 17/11/2022

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### MONITORING METHODOLOGY What have been done?

**689 Online Rumors**  
**380 News media Rumors**

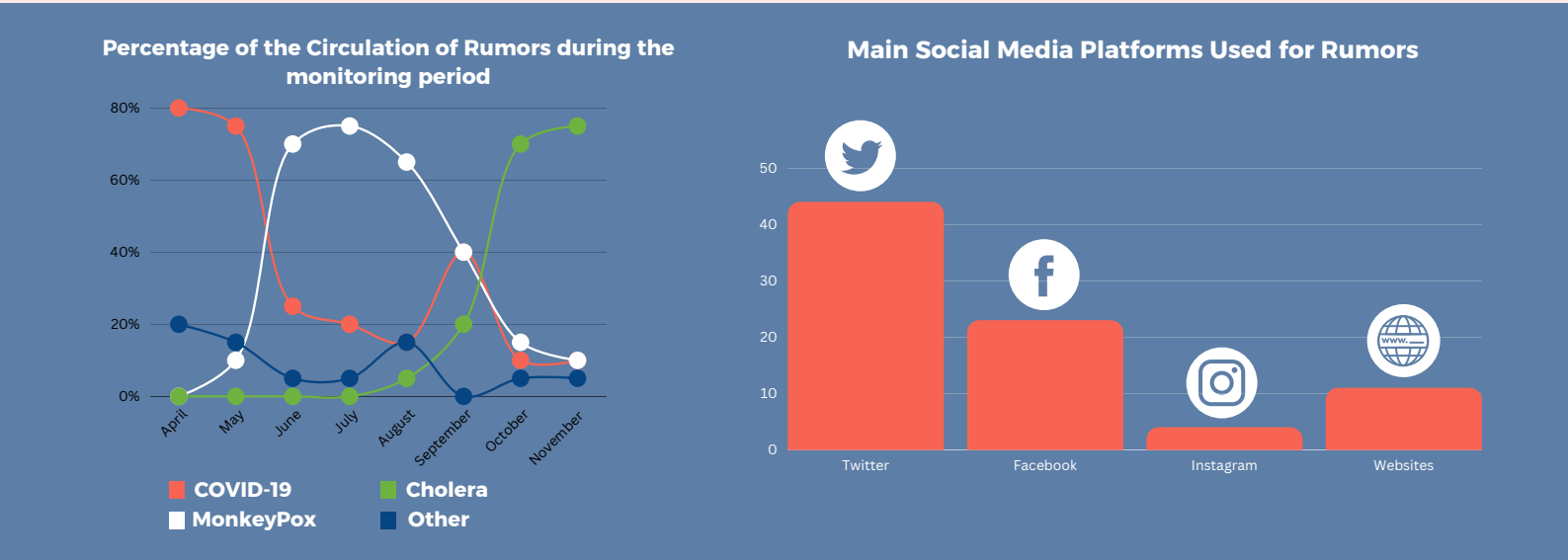
82 news content were categorized as media health rumors to be fact-checked during the monitoring period

**April 1 - November 22**

**Monitoring Duration**

**COVID-19**  
**MonkeyPox**  
**HAV**  
**Cholera**

**Main Recurring Topics**



### SUPPORTING JOURNALISTS/CITIZEN JOURNALISTS

**680**

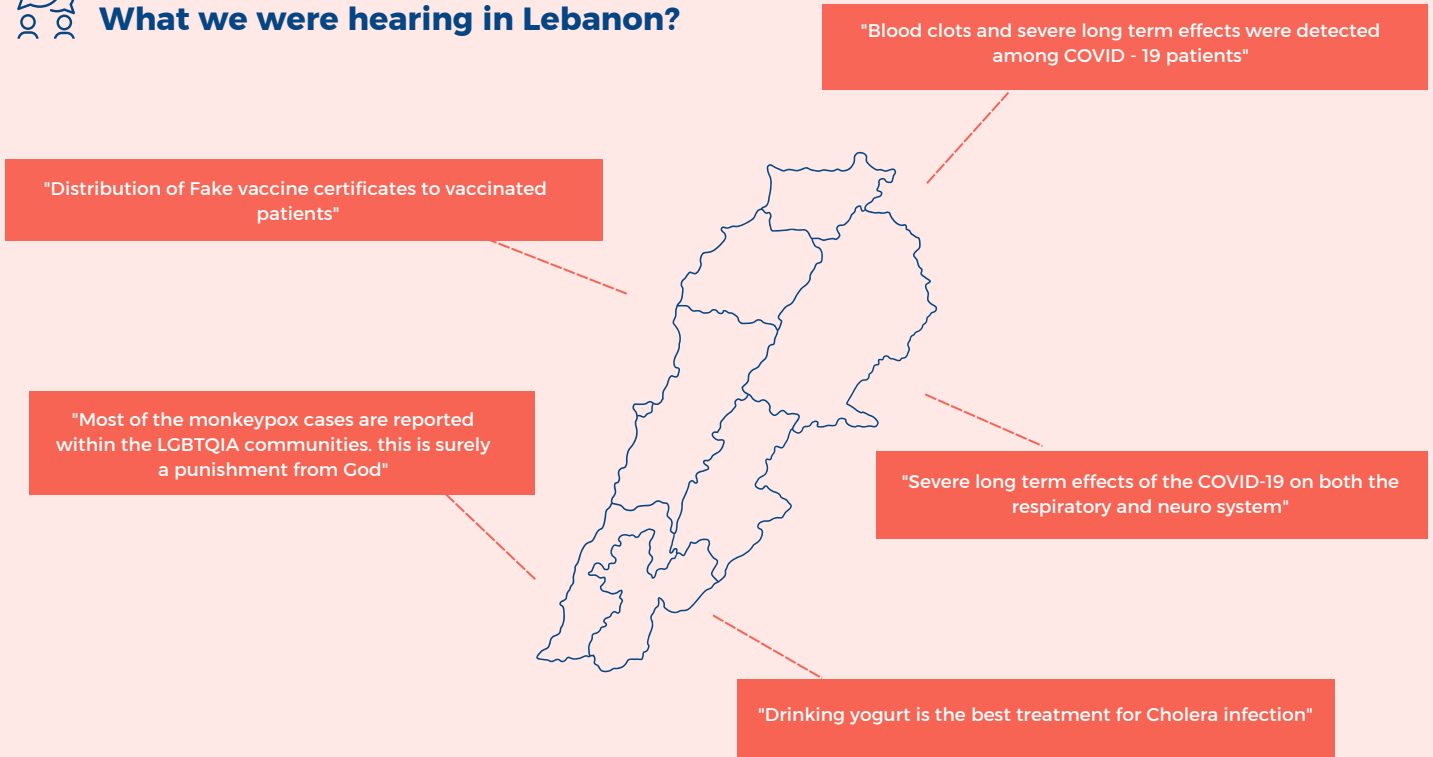
Journalists received the bi-weekly media bulletins through Mailchimp and media WhatsApp groups to ensure a sustainable health information ecosystem and limit the spread of health rumors



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**SOCIAL LISTENING**  
**What we were hearing in Lebanon?**



**Q Misinformation on Vaccines**

Many rumors shared by the public sphere focused on the "vaccines' breakthrough cases", as an excuse against getting vaccinated, or by sharing conspiracy theories on the compositions of the COVID-19 vaccines

**Stigmatization**

According to BMC Medicine: "Stigma is a well-documented barrier to health seeking behavior, engagement in care and adherence to treatment across a range of health conditions globally." In fact, stigmatization within the information ecosystem can be examined through the discrimination against a group of people or a place, and which is directly associated with a lack of knowledge regarding any health topic that is addressed.

Across the offline and online methodologies of rumors monitoring, it was crucial to highlight on how, rumors on health issues and pandemics, were framed on vulnerable communities through blaming and sharing fear and panic among Syrian and Palestinian refugees, migrant workers and LGBTQIAs.

Based on Maharat's analysis, fear and anxiety on an outbreak, about getting vaccinated or even from a community can lead to negative attitudes and beliefs toward the people and can affect the responsiveness of the public within an outbreak. For example, Monkey pox stigmas and rumors framed LGBTQIAs community in Lebanon for being the main source of this virus, which created social and religious intolerance against this vulnerable groups. In addition, Stigmas can also make people more likely to hide symptoms or illness, keep them from seeking health care centers and professionals, and prevent individuals from adopting the necessary measurements and precautions.

In order to halt the stigmatization process and mitigate the harmful consequences of health-related rumors, it is critical to have an explicit journalistic and informative framework to guide the media and the public into the correct intervention development, health measurements and updates, as well as the international adopted policies during outbreaks.

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## FACT-CHECKING METHODOLOGY What have been factchecked?

### 18 Rumors were Fact-checked in the Media Bulletins

- On COVID-19: The media bulletins reported many rumors focusing on the long and short term side effects of the COVID virus, including loss of senses, diagnosis with Hepatitis, brain damage, etc.. In addition, the monitored and fact-checked rumors on COVID-19 highlighted multiple dangerous mutations and variants of this virus in different contexts, aiming to provoke fear and panic among the public. As for the immunizations process, rumors extensively addressed the vaccines in multiple ways: side effects, efficiency on elderly and children, the probabilities of the microchips implanted in the vaccines, cure for other chronic diseases derived from the COVID-19 vaccines.
- On Monkey Pox: The media bulletins highlighted many rumors targeting the LGBTQIAs within the Monkey Pox context. Additionally, the fact-checking focused on decoding rumors questioning the availabilities of health care centers and hospital departments, specialized in treating and detecting Monkey Pox cases. On the contrary, multiple rumors aimed on diverting the public attention from taking the necessary measurements and precautions, particularly in "NOT" considering such a virus spread as an outbreak in Lebanon.
- On Cholera: The media bulletins reported on rumors questioning the necessary measurements and treatments to be applied when diagnosed with Cholera, while providing non scientific treatments to patients. Moreover, by targeting Syrian camps and refugees, the following monitored rumors claimed unverified stereotypical claims regarding the source of this virus, by putting this vulnerable community under high social and mental pressure.

## Guiding toolkit

Journalists should **verify and fact-check** all health information through relying on **scientific studies, national and international health organizations and health care/humanitarian experts**

Restrain from **fueling stigma** around the most **vulnerable population** particularly on health related topics

Restrain in using **misleading headlines** on any health subject that might cause **physical and mental risks** among the public

#factcheck #COVID-19 #MonkeyPox #HAV #Cholera

