Infodemic management
& the COVID-19 pandemic

THE LATEST ON THE COVID-19 GLOBAL SITUATION
& INFODEMIC MANAGEMENT
Overview

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Current global situation
As of 29 November 2020, 10:00AM CEST

• > 61 million cases
  • 5 countries with highest cumulative number of cases
    - United States of America
    - India
    - Brazil
    - Russian Federation
    - France

• > 1.4 million deaths
  • 5 countries with highest cumulative number of deaths
    - United States of America
    - Brazil
    - India
    - Mexico
    - The United Kingdom
Current global situation
Cases reported to WHO as of 29 November 2020, 10:00AM CEST

* Cases depicted by bars; deaths depicted by line
COVID-19 death reported in the last 7 days
Per million population

FROM 23 NOVEMBER 2020, 10:00AM CEST to 29 NOVEMBER 2020, 10:00 AM CEST
An infodemic is accompanying the pandemic

• An infodemic is an overabundance of information – good or bad – that makes it difficult for people to make decisions for their health

• Misinformation\(^1\), disinformation\(^2\) and fake news can cause real harm to health, public trust, social cohesion and emergency response

We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is just as dangerous.

– Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
  Director-General, World Health Organization

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\(^1\) inaccurate information

\(^2\) false or inaccurate information intended to mislead
The COVID-19 infodemic can harm health

- The infodemic can lead to confusion, risk-taking and harmful behaviours
- In some countries, misinformation has generated mistrust in governments, public health authorities and science

In Iran, approximately:
- 700 people have died
- 5,011 have been hospitalized and
- 90 have developed blindness or eyesight damage after drinking methanol as a “cure” for coronavirus

Photo credits:
Technology has changed the way information is produced, distributed and consumed

- Infodemics thrive in the virtual space
- Managing the infodemic has become more challenging with rapid spread of mis- and dis-information through social media
- Managing the infodemic is critical to managing the pandemic
How people receive, process and act on information varies

Understanding how information originates, evolves and spreads on different platforms and channels is key to managing the infodemic
To manage the infodemic, we need an evidence-based framework, like that of epidemiologists.

**Measure & monitor**
- the impact of an infodemic during health emergencies

**Prepare & Monitor**
- Detect & understand the spread and impact of an infodemic

**Detect**
- Detect & understand the spread and impact of an infodemic

**Intervene**
- Respond & deploy interventions that protect and mitigate the infodemic and its harmful effects

**Strengthen**
- Evaluate infodemic interventions and strengthen resilience of individuals and communities to the infodemic

**Enable**

**Epidemic**
- 1 Surveillance
- 2 Virus
- 3 Disease
- 4 Interventions

**Infodemic**
- 1 Listening
- 2 Narratives
- 3 Distrust
- 4 Interventions
The right information at the right time, in the right format

• While it is not possible to completely eliminate, it is possible to manage the infodemic.

• Infodemic management aims to ensure people have access to factual information in a timely manner that is easily understood; so they may rapidly adopt behaviours to protect health and the health of others during an epidemic.

• Infodemic management must:
  - Be backed up by science
  - Rely on evidence-based interventions
  - Make use of best practices, including sharing experiences and continuous learning.
Infodemic management interventions aim to influence health behaviour during epidemics

Infodemic interventions

1. LISTEN TO CONCERNS
2. TRANSLATE SCIENCE & COMMUNICATE RISK
3. PROMOTE RESILIENCE TO MISINFORMATION
4. ENGAGE & EMPOWER COMMUNITIES
WHO uses a digital listening approach which analyses and quantifies information associated with COVID-19. For example, top keywords and topics are tracked in order to identify trends and help manage the infodemic.

**Quantifying information through social listening**

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**Top rising topics (12 – 18 Nov 2020)**

Based on % change of conversation volume from the previous week:

- Supportive Care (Healthcare) - 95%
- The Cause - 78%
- Further spread: Immunity - 61%
- Supportive Care (Equipment) - 50%
- Risk - Underlying Conditions - 49%
- Protection from Transmission - 47%
- Faith - 44%
- Travel - 42%
- Personal Measures - 40%
- Unions and Industry - 36%
- Testing - 36%
- Risk - Demographics (Age) - 36%
- Means of Transmission - 31%
- Confirmed Symptoms - 30%
- Other discussed symptoms - 29%
- Protection - 27%
- Measures in Public Settings - 22%
- Vulnerable Communities - 21%
- Non-proven treatment (Nutrition) - 21%
- Technology - 20%
- Pre-Symptomatic transmission - 20%
- Statistics & Data - 19%
- Vaccines - 13%
- Risk - Demographics (Sex) - 9%
- Myths - 9%
- Vulnerable People - 7.0%
Translating science into protective measures
WHO video guidance on COVID-19

**MASKS**

- Medical and fabric masks: who wears what when?
- How to wear a fabric mask safely
- How to wear a fabric mask
- How to wear a medical mask

**TRANSMISSION**

- How to break the chains of transmission
- Three factors help you make safer choices during COVID-19

**PROTECTING OURSELVES**

- How to protect yourself against COVID-19
- Seven steps to prevent the spread of the virus
Being resistant to misinformation requires an understanding of how information flows, but also understanding of cognition and behaviour.
WHO works with communities to protect health during epidemics

- WHO EPI-WIN has established representative groups from key communities (faith-based, youth, employers and workers) who communicate regularly with WHO and give input on projects and initiatives. Examples:
  - **Co-development** of practical guidance on COVID-19 education, preparedness and response to support faith-based organizations and faith communities
  - **Collaborating** with young people to design creative, engaging and relevant communication around ‘reducing transmission of COVID-19’
  - **Facilitating** a virtual dialogue series together with leaders and representatives from the World of Work

- Since the beginning of the pandemic, WHO EPI-WIN has hosted **80 COVID-19 related webinars** with **participants from 149 countries**
Working together to support public health

- Launched in June 2020, the Collective Service is a partnership between the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Collective Service leverages active support from the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) and key stakeholders from the public health and humanitarian sectors.

- The Collective Service works on risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) to ensure consistent, systematic and predictable support to partners involved in public health, humanitarian and development responses to the pandemic.
Infodemiology: the science behind infodemic management

Infodemic management is an evolving area of research and practice

AREAS TO FURTHER EXPLORE

• How do overwhelming amounts of information affect behaviour in emergencies and what interventions are effective in addressing it?

• How does online behaviour affect offline action?

• How does the infodemic affect cognition and influence seeking of health services?

• How does the role of policy interventions successfully address and mitigate health misinformation?

• How does the infodemic affect closed networks and vulnerable populations?
First global WHO infodemic manager training completed on 26 November 2020

- 278 participants from 78 countries
- Various lectures by infodemic management specialists on topics such as:
  - Tools for analysis of the infodemic
  - Public health and epidemiology in context of infodemic response
  - Risk communication and community engagement
Resources on infodemic management

WHO RESOURCES

• **Infodemic management**
  WHO infodemic management work and activities
  https://www.who.int/teams/risk-communication/infodemic-management

• **EPI-WIN updates**
  An archive of COVID-19 related weekly updates
  https://www.who.int/teams/risk-communication/epi-win-updates

• **3rd Virtual Global WHO Infodemic Management Conference**
  Whole-of-society challenges and solutions to respond to infodemics

OTHER RESOURCES

• **Sending SMS messages for the general public for COVID-19 response**
  WHO, ITU and UNICEF are collaborating to facilitate sending short messages SMS to inform the general public about COVID-19

• **When old technology meets new: How UN Global Pulse is using radio and AI to leave no voice behind**
  UN Global Pulse can offer speech to text (radio) listening

• **UNESCO series on journalism education**
  UNESCO medio/journalist training
  https://en.unesco.org/unesco-series-on-journalism-education
3rd virtual global WHO Infodemic Management conference

Whole-of-society challenges & solutions to respond to infodemics

11 December 2020
8:00 EST / 14:00 CET / 20:00 ICT

#societyVSinfodemic
How to protect ourselves & others

9 important COVID-19 prevention measures

01 Stay home and self-isolate if you feel unwell, even with mild symptoms

02 Clean hands frequently with soap & water for 40 seconds or with alcohol-based hand rub

03 Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when you cough or sneeze

04 Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth

05 Maintain a minimum physical distance of at least 1 metre from others

06 Stay away from crowds and avoid poorly ventilated indoor spaces

07 Use a fabric mask where physical distancing of at least 1 metre is not possible

08 Use a medical / surgical mask if you may be at higher risk (age, medical conditions)

09 Regularly clean & disinfect frequently touched surfaces