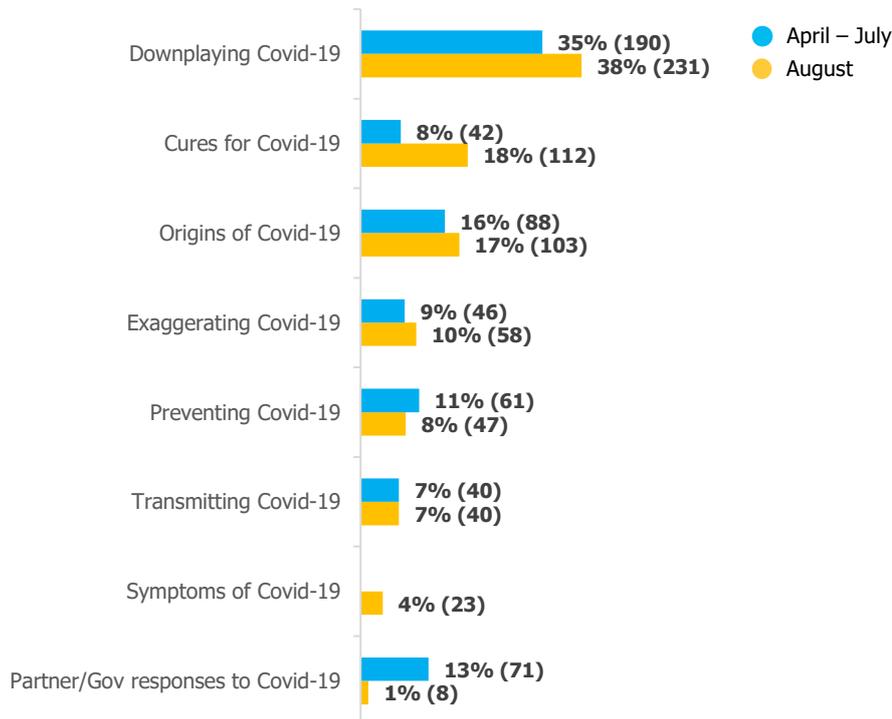


# Covid-19 rumour tracking bulletin



## Trend data



## Key trends in August

- **Downplaying the risks associated with Covid-19 remains the most common rumour.** However, fewer people expressed the belief that Africans are immune to the virus, which was previously the most prevalent rumour downplaying the virus. Across August, the idea that the government is capitalising on Covid-19 for political reasons was the most common reason for people not taking the virus seriously.
- **There was a spike in rumours around Covid-19 cures in August,** with alcohol consumption and home remedies frequently mentioned.
- **Fewer rumours around governmental and agency responses to the virus surfaced in August.** This suggests that fears around repatriation and assistance being reduced or stopped altogether were less widespread in August than previously.

## Background

This is the second of a series of monthly rumour-tracking bulletins covering various refugee settlements across Uganda (see the demographic section for more information). The findings will be shared with the humanitarian community in Uganda to provide timely, relevant information about Covid-19 rumours.

As an inter-agency effort, multiple partners shared rumours documented by their staff and volunteers. Partners include Adventist Development and Relief Agency, African Women Rising, AVSI Foundation, CARE, Centre for Environmental Sustainability and Initiative, Danish Refugee Council, Finn Church Aid, Feedback, Referral and Resolution Mechanism, Internews, International Rescue Committee and Save the Children.

If you would like to take part in the rumour tracking initiative, please contact [anna.christensen@drc.ngo](mailto:anna.christensen@drc.ngo).

The rumour tracking is an ongoing project, and these bulletins will be updated and shared on a monthly basis. Feedback is welcome. Please send your comments to [kai.kamei@groundtruthsolutions.org](mailto:kai.kamei@groundtruthsolutions.org).

## Method

Community volunteers and NGO staff who interact daily with affected communities in Uganda captured rumours reactively from 1st–31st August 2020 across various settlements.

Supported by:



## Key findings

The most common rumours community members reported were:

- **Downplaying the risk of Covid-19:** the conviction that the government is exaggerating the risk of Covid-19 for political gain, that the virus does not exist at all, or that it only affects older persons.
- **Believing the virus can be cured** by drinking alcohol, water, or hot tea with salt; eating vitamin-rich fruits and vegetables; or eating soap.
- **Questioning the origins of the virus:** the belief that Covid-19 is a bioweapon which superpowers are using for their own political and economic agendas, or that the virus is divine punishment.
- **Exaggerating Covid-19:** the belief that contracting the virus cannot be avoided, that it has already reached communities, or that death is inevitable if one should contract Covid-19.

Humanitarian workers did not actively solicit these rumours but rather took note as they surfaced. Some 610 rumours were attributed to refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Burundi, and Rwanda, as well as Ugandan nationals.

The method described in this bulletin does not lend itself to verifying the percentage of refugees sharing rumours, but it does help to highlight which rumours are being shared by the relatively small proportion of refugees who do so.<sup>1</sup>

The patterns in reported rumours have been analysed according to gender, age, and location, but only differences above 30 respondents and the threshold of 10% have been included in the analysis.

For more information on the methodology, including the TOR for data collectors and access to the raw data, visit the [Rumour Tracking Team Folder](#).

## Demographics

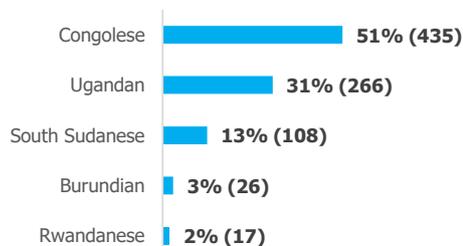
The demographics of those who reported rumours are similar to the first bulletin (April–July 2020) in terms of nationality and age.

While rumours are still predominantly reported in Kyaka II, we have seen a significant increase in responses from Rwamwanja (from 0% in April–July to 18% in August).

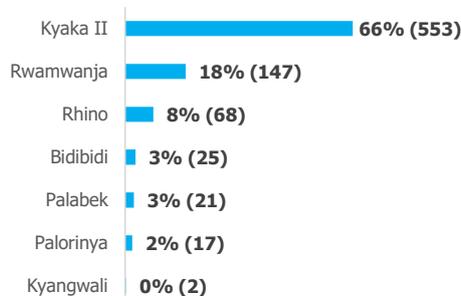
There was a higher proportion of females reporting rumours in August, up from 44% to 56%.

## Demographics of those who reported rumours (August 2020)

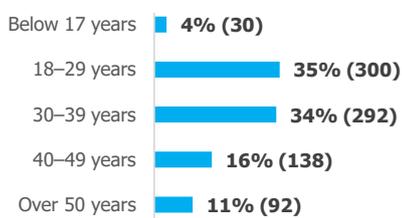
### Nationality



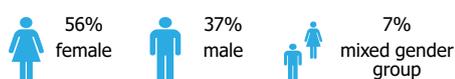
### Location



### Age



### Gender



<sup>1</sup> While rumours are spreading in Uganda, it is important to note that recent assessments suggest that most refugees can distinguish between rumours and facts regarding Covid-19. Ground Truth Solutions' key informant interviews with communities across Uganda in June 2020 found that 81% of refugee leaders are confident that people in their communities are able to separate fact from fiction.

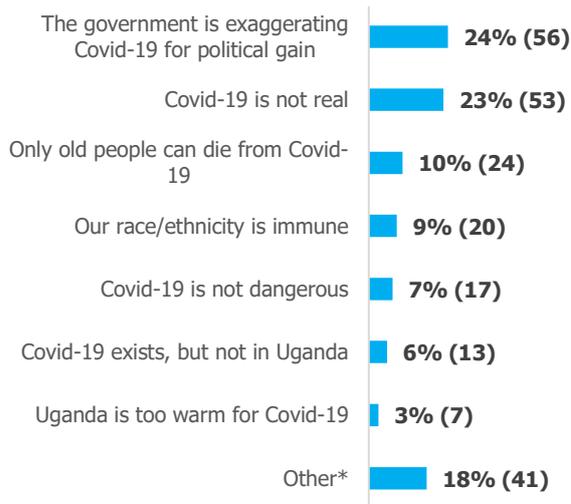
## 38% of rumours relate to:



### Downplaying Covid-19

- While downplaying the gravity of Covid-19 was still the most common rumour in August, a smaller proportion of people share the belief that Africans cannot be affected by the virus. Only 9% of rumours downplaying the risks of Covid-19 spoke of race immunity, as opposed to 29% from April to July 2020.
- The conviction that the government is exaggerating the risk of the virus to support their own political agenda was the most popular reason people gave for believing that Covid-19 does not pose a credible health risk.

Breakdown of rumours relating to downplaying the virus (n=231)



\*Other includes people who say that Covid-19 is over, that there is no evidence that the virus exists, or that it only spreads in big cities and abroad.

## 18% of rumours relate to:



### Covid-19 cures

- Similarly to rumours recorded between April and July, alcohol consumption was most commonly mentioned as an effective cure against the virus in August.
- Drinking water or hot tea with salt, eating vitamin-rich fruits and vegetables, and eating soap were recorded as home remedies people suggest cure Covid-19.
- A more unusual rumour documented in Rhino was the belief that animal waste can be used to cure the virus.



“The rumour that Covid-19 can be treated using elephant waste in Namibia was heard via radio. This made the community think that other animal waste can also be used to treat the disease.” – Rhino, South Sudanese male in his 30s



“When you drink waragi, you are cured of corona.” – Rwamwanja, Ugandan female over 50 years old

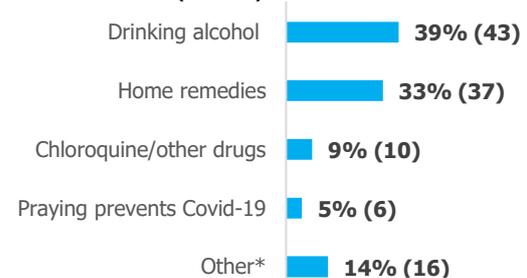
## Changes since the last bulletin (April–July 2020)

- ∧ Increase of over 10%
- ∧ Increase of 5–10%
- = No change or less than 5%
- ∨ Decrease of 5–10%
- ∨ Decrease of over 10%
- ★ Rumour was not mentioned in the last bulletin



“[T]he government is taking advantage of the existence of Covid-19 in other countries to ask for donations to fund the upcoming elections.” – Kyaka II, Congolese male in his 30s

Breakdown of rumours relating to cures for the virus (n=112)



\*Other includes people who say that Covid-19 only affects people in big cities, foreigners, rich people, and those who are unclean, or that it does not exist – that the stress of contracting the virus is what kills people.

17% of rumours relate to:



## The origins of Covid-19

- The belief that the virus was manufactured by foreign powers in order to kill Africans was the most common bioweapon conspiracy.
- Other theories on the origins of Covid-19 speak to the conviction that it is a punishment from God and that it signals the end times.



"People say that the vaccines being made are intended to make the black race even more sick so that the African population can be reduced in number" – Kyaka II, Congolese male in his 30s



"The virus was made in America and China. It was tested on 37 dogs, and when they died, they knew it worked." – Kyaka II, Congolese male over 50 years old



"A girl in the community prophesied that God sent Covid-19 to punish humans for their sins." – Rhino, South Sudanese female in her 30s

10% of rumours relate to:



## Exaggerating Covid-19

- The belief that Covid-19 cannot be avoided or controlled is the most common rumour around exaggerations of the virus.
- Another popular recorded rumour is that Covid-19 has already reached people's communities and that death is unavoidable if one contracts the virus – although this belief is less prevalent than it was among the rumours recorded between April and July.



"COVID-19 is inevitable. It will be like HIV/AIDS." – Rwamwanja, Ugandan female in her 30s

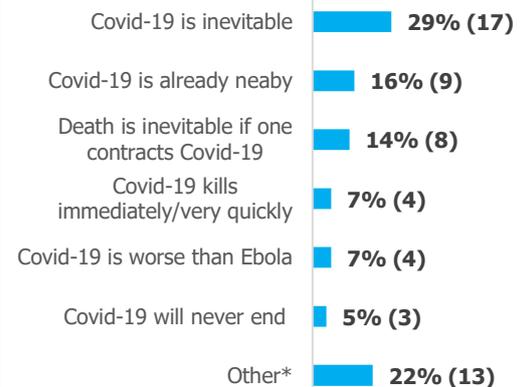
= No change or less than 5%

Breakdown of rumours relating to the origins of the virus (n=103)



\*Other includes the belief that the virus originated in America, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Italy, Sweden, Canada, or Europe. Other rumours mentioned include the view that Covid-19 is a bacterial infection, that it was created by intellectuals and the Illuminati, or that it came from animals such as cats, chimpanzees, or other wild animals.

Breakdown of rumours relating to exaggerating the virus (n=58)



\*Other includes the belief that people who have the virus breathe out maggots, that the official death rate in Uganda is much higher than what is being reported, or that schools will never reopen.

## 8% of rumours relate to:



### Preventing Covid-19

- In line with rumours recorded between April and June, consuming hard alcohol such as distilled spirits or “waragi” was again most often mentioned as a way to avoid contracting Covid-19.
- Home remedies again featured strongly as a way to avoid contracting the virus. Drinking tea; eating healthy foods such as fruit, vegetables, and protein; and smoking were all mentioned as effective ways of warding off Covid-19.



“The more alcohol you drink, the greater the chances of not getting the virus because alcohol kills the virus instantly.” – Kyaka II, Congolese male in his 30s



“Eating enough ash and soda ash can prevent the spread of the virus.” – Rhino, South Sudanese female over 50 years old

## 5% of rumours relate to:



### Transmitting Covid-19

- Among rumours relating to transmission, the belief that Covid-19 is transmitted by those who have poor personal hygiene was mentioned most frequently. This rumour did not feature strongly between April and July, when the most common transmission rumour expressed the belief that animals spread the virus.
- Failure to shower regularly, not washing one’s hands after using the bathroom, and general lack of proper sanitation were all mentioned as examples of poor hygiene which contributed to the spread of the virus. There seems to be some confusion around hygiene measures for respiratory and water-borne diseases.
- Bats and fish are specifically mentioned as animals which are believed to be spreading Covid-19.
- In terms of specific groups of people believed to be transmitting the virus, white people, Chinese people, and Congolese refugees were explicitly mentioned.

## 4% of rumours relate to:



### The symptoms of Covid-19

- While rumours around Covid-19 symptoms did not surface between April and July, the belief that the symptoms of the virus are the same as those of the flu was present in August.
- Other misconceptions include the conviction that Covid-19 symptoms manifest much like those of malaria, or that people who have contracted the virus will bleed from their nose and ears.

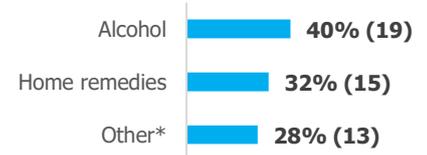


“I heard that if one gets the corona virus, he/she bleeds from both the nose and the ears.” – Rwamwanja, Ugandan female in her 30s

= No change or less than 5%

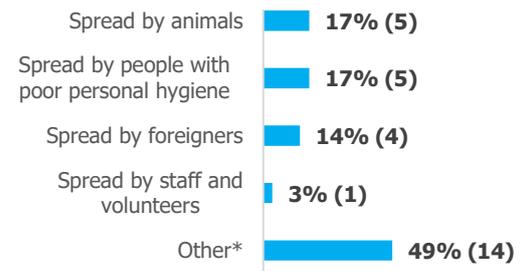
\* Rumour was not mentioned in the last bulletin

Breakdown of rumours relating to preventing the virus (n=47)



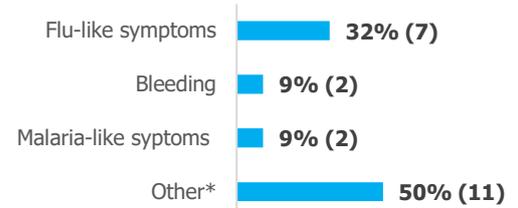
\*Other includes the belief that drinking quinine, washing one’s hands with waragi, or washing one’s hands with cleaning products prevents Covid-19.

Breakdown of rumours relating to transmitting the virus (n=29)



\*Other includes the belief that Covid-19 is transmitted like malaria and Ebola, through the skin, or sexually. Other recorded rumours include the idea that lactating women transmit the virus, that Covid-19 spreads on the wind, or that it only affects truck drivers.

Breakdown of rumours relating to symptoms of the virus (n=22)



\*Other includes rumours that symptoms include falling over, hair loss, skin rashes, and red eyes.

1% of rumours relate to:



### Partner/government responses to Covid-19

- While rumours about partner/government responses to the virus were among the top three most common rumours reported between April and July, such rumours were much less prevalent in August. Only a handful of people mentioned fears of cuts to humanitarian assistance being cut.



“No support for refugees will be available from September.” – Kyaka II, Congolese female over 50 years old

Decrease of over 10%

Breakdown of rumours relating to partner/government responses (n=8)

