Enhancing LEA/PH responses to misinformation and disinformation on biological threats

World Organisation for Animal Health

WOAH Regional Seminar for Focal Points of Communication

9-11 November 2026

INTERPOL For official use only

ENABLING THE WORLD'S POLICE TO MEET

THE CHALLENGES OF FIGHTING INTERNATIONAL CRIME

INTERPOL



A GLOBAL STRUCTURE



INTERPOL

Bioterrorism Prevention Unit: Mandate

"To support INTERPOL's global law enforcement community, through an inter-agency approach, to execute duties related to the prevention, preparedness and response to biological incidents, in particular the misuse of biological agents by non-state actors"

4 areas of work



Police Data Management



Analysis



Global Network Access



Specialized expertise

INTERPOL For official use only

Biological cases of concern

Natural Outbreaks 01

Unintended · zoonotic or endemic

EXAMPLES

- Disease outbreaks with a high impact (e.g. COVID-19, EVD, FMD, Marburg)
- Unusual disease outbreak under investigation
- Cases requiring LEA intervention

CONSIDERATIONS

Impact Mortality, health-system load, trade and economic disruption

Risk of importation Travel and trade links, vector suitability, pathogen characteristics

Risk of diversion Clinical isolates and diagnostic samples leaving custody

Detection lag Time from index case to a confirmed, reportable signal

Accidental Cases 02

Unintended · containment failure

EXAMPLES

- Laboratory leakage
- Failure of contamination
- Mass scale accidental cases
- Cases requiring LEA intervention

CONSIDERATIONS

Impact Casualties, containment cost, loss of public confidence

Risk of importation Onward spread via transfers, shipments and personnel

Risk of diversion Inventory gaps, insider access, unaccounted stocks

Oversight failure Biosafety level, reporting culture, disclosure delay

Deliberate Cases 03

Criminal or terrorism intent

EXAMPLES

- Deliberate biological incidents by non-state actors (criminal / terrorism purposes)
- Illicit trade of biological agents and toxins
- Terrorism propaganda
- Hoax, threat and extortion

CONSIDERATIONS

Scale Single target through to mass-casualty

Motivation Terrorism, criminal (extortion, grievance)

New modus operandi Agents and toxins used, acquisition, means of delivery, use of science and technology

Actors Terrorist organizations, criminal groups, unaffiliated individuals (lone wolves)

INTERPOL For official use only

Profiles of Biological Threats to Animal Health

1	**Agrocrime Agroterrorism**	Deliberate introduction of an animal disease, contamination of animal foods, crop-disease attack, attack on livestock infrastructure, illicit movement of infected animals, etc.
2	**Illicit movement of infected animals**	Deliberate concealment of disease status, exploitation of disease-related price differences, document fraud, corruption, use of intermediaries to obscure animal origin, etc.
3	**Mis/disinformation to disrupt animal industry**	False disease outbreak claim, false contamination claim, fake warning, coordinated social media messages, market manipulation through rumors, deepfake and manipulated media content, etc.
4	**Smuggling of pathogens**	Smuggling of virus or bacteria, false documentation of imported materials, illicit acquisition or movement of pathogens, infected samples, or cultures, etc.
5	**Illicit trafficking of animals or animal products**	Trafficking of wildlife animals, false declaration of animal products, online trafficking, trafficking of high-value genetic material, etc.

INTERPOL For official use only

How Mis/Disinformation amplifies biological threats?

CONTRIBUTE TO PUBLIC HEALTH CRISES

Spread false or misleading claims about disease outbreaks, transmission, prevention or treatment — potentially increasing exposure, delaying care or worsening an emergency.

UNDERMINE DISEASE SURVEILLANCE & RESPONSE

Generate false outbreak signals, obscure genuine threats and erode trust in official reporting — complicating early warning, verification and response.

ENABLE CRIMINAL & ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION

Exploit fabricated disease narratives to coerce producers, manipulate markets, cause financial losses or facilitate illicit trade.

INTERPOL For official use only

Categories of bio threats involving mis/disinformation

#	Category	Actors	Consequences
1	**Outbreak misrepresentation (Outbreak denial & fabricated outbreaks)**	Influencers, Rumor networks	Attacks on responders, response disruption Failed containment, expansion of outbreaks
2	**False health advice & cures (infodemic)**	Influencers Informal sellers	Mass poisonings with fake products, fraud Disruption of public order
3	**Propaganda & incitement for deliberate attack using virus**	Violent extremists Terrorist groups	Radicalization, target selection Disruption of public safety and security
4	**Criminal exploitation through fraud and counterfeiting**	Organised crime groups	Market manipulation, Illicit trade and profit Economic loss.
5	**Incitement to non-compliance with public health measures**	Influencers, Rumor networks	Response costs Disruption of public safety and security
6	**Bio-threat hoaxes & false alarms**	Lone actors, criminals	Response costs, Alarm fatigue

INTERPOL For official use only

[Case 1-1] Mis/disinformation involving EVD outbreaks

1 · Ebola outbreak (Aug 2018)

2 · Fear and uncertainty

3 · Rumours & misinformation

4 · Distrust of health authorities

5 · Avoiding hospitals & tracing

6 · Obstruction & attacks on responders

7 · Disease-control failure

What WHO observed (Oct 2018)

Faced with rumours and misinformation, some families cared for sick relatives at home; patients left facilities or avoided follow-up; safe burials were refused -> **Increased transmission risk.**

After the Beni attack (22 Sep 2018, 21 killed)

A town-wide shutdown severely disrupted EVD response team
Contact follow-up fell to 60–76% while field work was suspended.

When LEA is needed

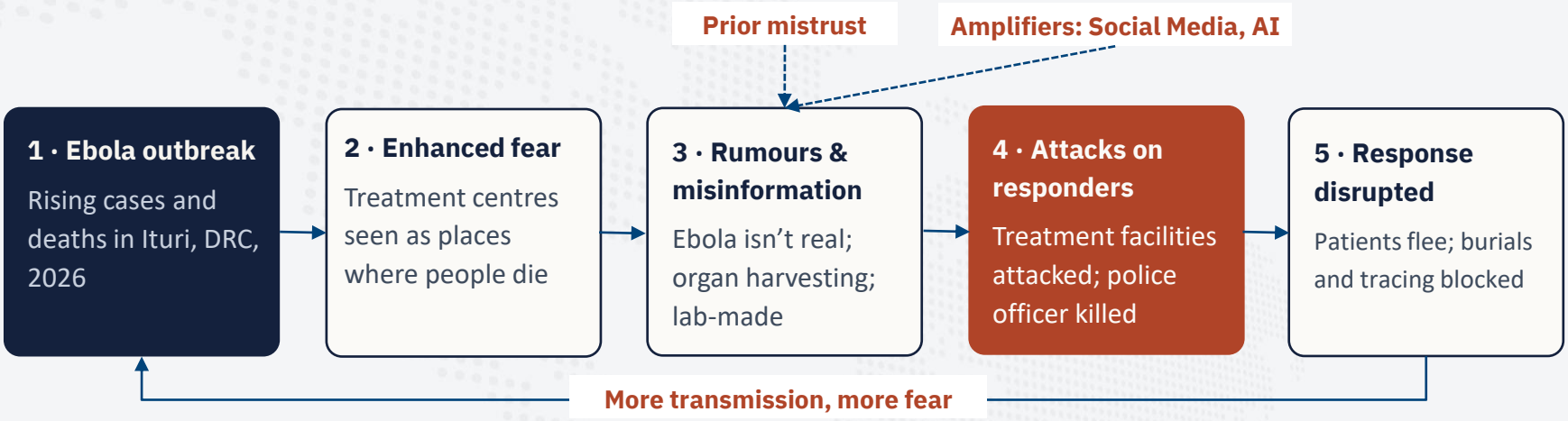
Beyond this point, public-health communication alone is not enough.

- Attacks on health workers
- Obstructed safe burials
- Attacks on treatment centres
- Threats to vaccination teams
- Obstructed contact tracing
- False info used to mobilise crowds

Sources: WHO Disease Outbreak News (27 Sep & 4 Oct 2018); UN News (25 Sep 2018); Africanews (Sep 2018); Al Jazeera / Harvard survey (2019)

INTERPOL For official use only

[Case 1-2] Mis/disinformation involving EVD outbreaks



EVD misinformation sparks conflicts (Ituri - DRC, 2026)

Treatment centres attacked; a police officer killed in clashes over a body; prosecutors warned rumour-spreaders. In 2019, 1 in 4 surveyed believed Ebola wasn't real.

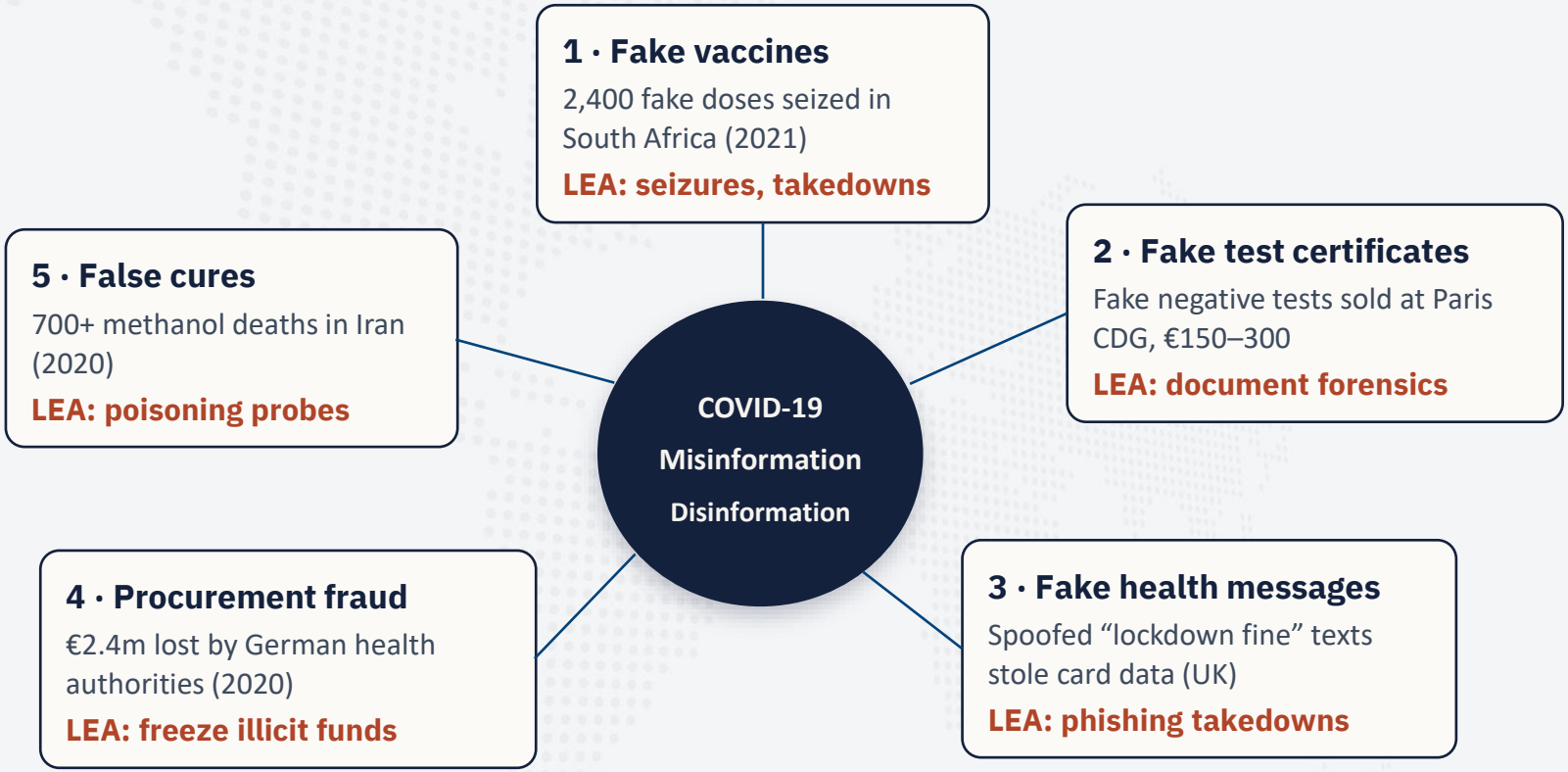
An infodemic developed within hours (May 2026)

After WHO's 17 May emergency declaration, TikTok videos called Ebola a fabrication; lab-origin and "hidden cure" claims followed, some pushed by **AI-powered conspiracy channels**.

Sources: KAS (Sittig & Nehring, May 2026); BBC Verify via The Star (Jul 2026); CIR (2026); Al Jazeera / Harvard survey (2019)

INTERPOL For official use only

[Case 2] Typologies of Covid-19 mis/disinformation



Sources: INTERPOL / OCCRP (Mar 2021); Europol via Euronews (Feb 2021); CTSI (Mar 2020); INTERPOL "Unmasked" (Apr 2020); AP (Apr 2020)

INTERPOL For official use only

[Case 3] Exploitation of Animal Disease Misinformation



Summary:

Criminal gangs in XXXXX were faking outbreaks of African swine fever on farms free of the disease and forcing farmers to sell their healthy pigs at sharply lower prices.

In the southwestern province of YYYYY alone, authorities have already intercepted 10,000 live pigs, some infected with the virus, that were destined for other provinces.

MODUS OPERANDI

01

Manufacture fear

Rumours of outbreaks spread locally; dead pigs dumped on clean farms and left at roadsides to convince farmers the disease had arrived.

02

Introduce the agent

In the more extreme cases, drones dropped infected material into piggeries. One farm manager reported virus found in the dropped objects.

03

Buy at a discount

Farmers, facing culls and unable to verify the rumours, sold healthy herds well below market price to the traders who had created the panic.

04

Move and resell

Pigs and meat were then moved to higher-price provinces despite inter-provincial transport bans, and sold on as healthy stock.

Source: https://www.euronews.com/2019/07/12/china-vows-to-tackle-dead-pig-scam-amid-swine-fever-epidemic

INTERPOL For official use only

[Case 4] Illicit trafficking of infected animals



Summary:

On 14 August 2024, the QQQQ Department of Agriculture (DA) announced a rapid increase in ASF cases in DDDDD. The DA said the spread was suspected to have been exacerbated by “unscrupulous pig traders selling diseased pigs.” Officials specifically identified the movement of infected pigs as a significant factor in the rapid spread of ASF.

Outbreak of diseases

Unintended · zoonotic or endemic emergence

Illicit movement

False documentation / Bribe to gov’t officials

Extended contamination

Expansion of affected regions / disruption of supply channel

RELATED ISSUES

- Alleged misinformation campaign (not confirmed)
- Disruption of market -> panic selling of pigs
- Corruption of government officials involved

Source: https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1232024

INTERPOL For official use only

[Case 5] AI and Mis/Disinformation

Before AI

- Narrative
- Human content creation
- Translation
- Distribution

Linear, slow, limited by people and languages

After AI

- Narrative
- AI generation (Synthetic personas)
- AI translation to multiple languages
- AI personalisation
- Automated dissemination
- AI-assisted monitoring

Narrative loops back, fast production and dissemination, multilingual, more plausible

Gambia, Aug 2026: an AI-made farm disaster



- A Facebook page shared an image of a flooded poultry farm with dead chickens and floating eggs.
- Malagen's fact-check found it AI-generated, with no real source or location.
- 2,600+ reactions and 60+ shares

Sources: EEAS, 4th Report on FIMI Threats (Mar 2026); The BMJ (Jul 2024); Malagen fact-check (4 Aug 2026)

INTERPOL For official use only

Indicators of mis/disinformation

A	**Actor** *Who is behind it?*	Impersonates WHO, WOAH or vet authorities	Self-styled experts, unverifiable credentials	State-media or commercial ties; debunk history
B	**Behaviour** *How is it spread?*	Near-identical posts across accounts in minutes	Batch-created or dormant accounts waking up	Cross-platform bursts: Telegram → X → Facebook
C	**Content** *What is claimed?*	Unevidenced bioweapon or ‘secret biolab’ claims	Recycled cull footage, deepfaked officials	Miracle cures, fake vaccines, misread preprints
D	**Degree** *How far, how fast?*	Volume and velocity spikes above baseline	Jump from fringe channels into mainstream media	Information voids: no official answer yet
E	**Effect** *What is the impact?*	Falling vaccine uptake; hotline call surges	Unreported sick animals; resistance to culling	Threats to vets and health staff; trade shocks

Sources: EEAS ABCDE framework (Pamment, 2020) · WHO EPI-WIN · EU DisinfoLab CIB Detection Tree · WOAH–INTERPOL (2024)

INTERPOL For official use only

LEA-PH Responses for Mis/Disinformation

Category	Public health	Law enforcement
1. Outbreak denial & fabricated outbreaks	Rapid official confirmation, transparent case data exchange, trusted local messengers	OSINT early warning, trace coordinated fabrication, protect sites
2. False health advice & cures	Distribution of fact-checks, poison-centre and clinician alerts	Investigate harmful sellers, joint action with medicines regulators
3. Incitement to deliberate infection or attack	Protect facilities and staff, rapid threat-reporting channel	CT monitoring, threat assessment, arrest and prosecution
4. Fraud & counterfeiting	Verified supply lists, product authentication, public warnings	Seizures, takedowns, customs operations, financial intelligence
5. Incitement to non-compliance	Explain measures, engage communities, adapt to custom (e.g. burials)	Proportionate enforcement, public-order planning; act on violence, not dissent
6. Bio-threat hoaxes & false alarms	Rapid lab triage, calm risk communication	Joint threat assessment, HAZMAT response, investigation, cost recovery

INTERPOL For official use only

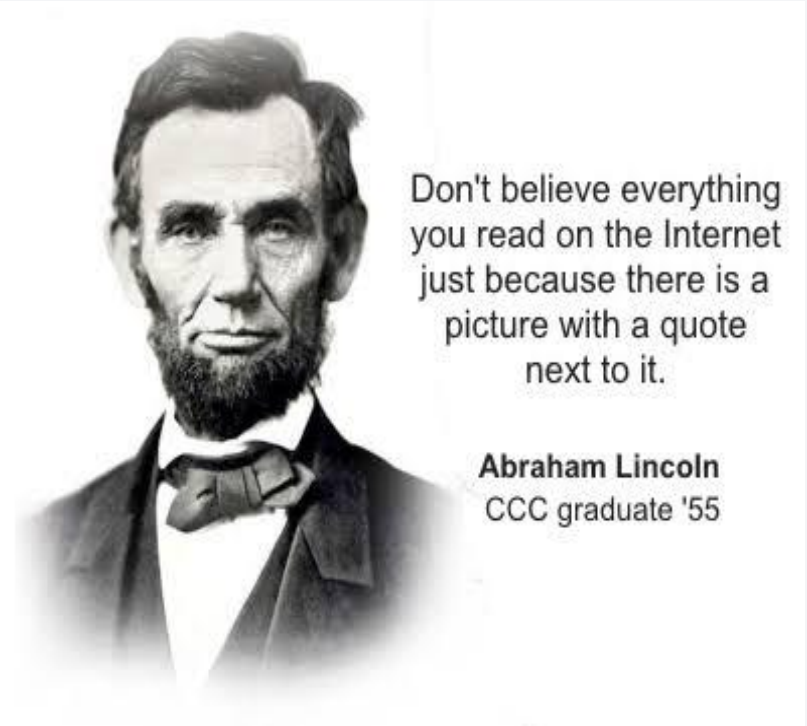
Conclusion

- Impact of misinformation and disinformation can be HUGE; early-stage response is critical.
- LEA-PH cooperation is essential to detect, identify, and counter mis- disinformation
- Enhanced communications & exchange of information
- Raising awareness on the indicators of mis/disinformation
- LEA and PH sectors need to be prepared for AI-enabled mis-disinformation threats.

INTERPOL For official use only

For discussion

- How LEA and PH need to cooperate for potential deliberate mis/disinformation campaigns during critical disease outbreaks?
- How can we determine whether a disseminated message is fake or genuine?
- How can we detect and respond to AI-enabled disinformation before it undermines outbreak response?



INTERPOL For official use only

INTERPOL

BIOTERRORISM PREVENTION UNIT

btpu@interpol.int

www.interpol.int
[*Crimes >> Terrorism >> Bioterrorism*]

www.youtube.com/INTERPOLHQ
[*CBRNE Playlist*]

@INTERPOL_CBRNE

INTERPOL For official use only