Detecting and responding to rumors and misinformation

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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In this session you will learn:

- ➤ Tactics to prevent and respond to rumors and misinformation
- ➤ Importance of networks and partners
- ➤ Factors to consider when determining if you should respond to false information, or not
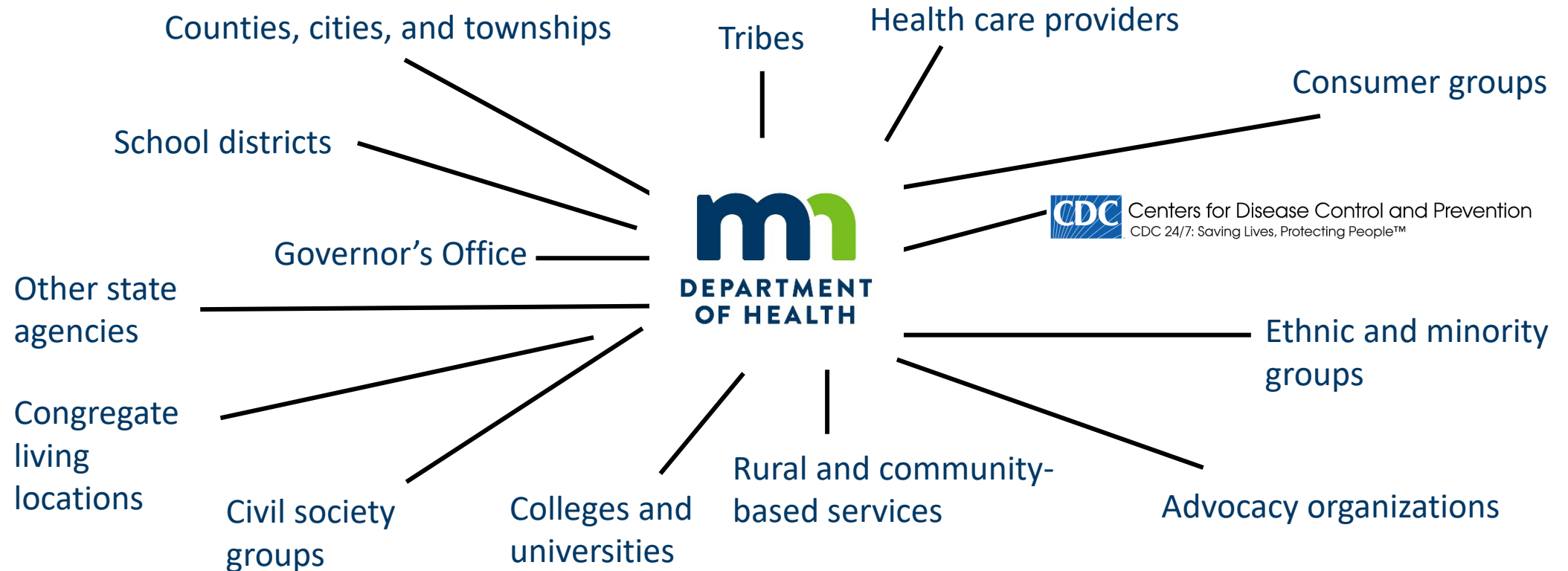- ➤ How to apply your skills for a simulated health event

Which rumors do **we** care about?

Which rumors do our **key stakeholders** care about?

How do we **find** rumors before it's too late?

How do we **address** a rumor?

Rumor found – to **react or ignore**?

Not all rumors are bad. Rumors can be useful.

- They can indicate new incidents and related community perceptions.

Counties, cities, and townships

Tribes

Health care providers

Consumer groups

School districts

Governor's Office

CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDC 24/7: Saving Lives, Protecting People™

Other state agencies

Ethnic and minority groups

Congregate living locations

Civil society groups

Colleges and universities

Rural and community-based services

Advocacy organizations

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WHAT DOES YOUR STAKEHOLDER MAP LOOK LIKE?

Which rumors do we care about?

Misinformation	Myths & harmful practices	Information that pose a public health risk	Information that harms reputation & diminishes trust in LPH/MDH

Rumor management

Rumors often fly in the absence of credible and frequent information. Therefore, first, give people the most accurate information possible, promptly and completely!

- Communicate and engage early
- Be transparent
- Listen to people's concerns
- Show empathy
- Provide information on what is being done
- Let the community know that they are part of the solution, and how they can help

Important considerations

Meet the demand/needs of the audiences.

Silence increases ambiguity and confusion.

Simply denying a rumor does not eliminate ambiguity; it may even increase it.

Address the rumor directly where needed. Not all need a response.

Use credible spokespersons and speakers to address rumors.

(Absolute truth)   **–**   (Virtual truth)   =   Public perception

| Based on facts, science, and data | Shaped by popular opinion, media, influencers, etc. | Can be driven by rumors and misinformation |

Approaches to understanding public perception

Utilize approaches to:

- Monitor and track concerns, suggestions, barriers, knowledge levels, practices, and beliefs

- Include social media monitoring that captures rumors, mis/disinformation, and fake news

- Detect offline rumors and misinformation

- Analyze behavioral insights

- Use data to inform decision-making

Intercept interviews

Hotlines
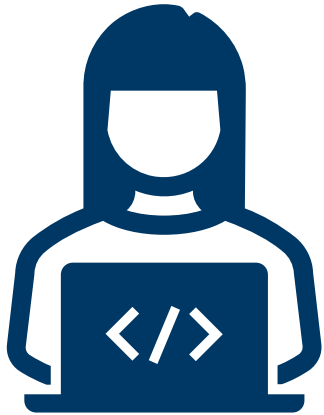
Social listening

Focus group discussions (online, offline)

Surveys, polls

Behavioral insights

Media monitoring

KAP studies (knowledge, attitudes, practices)

Talking to health care workers

and more

Be strategic
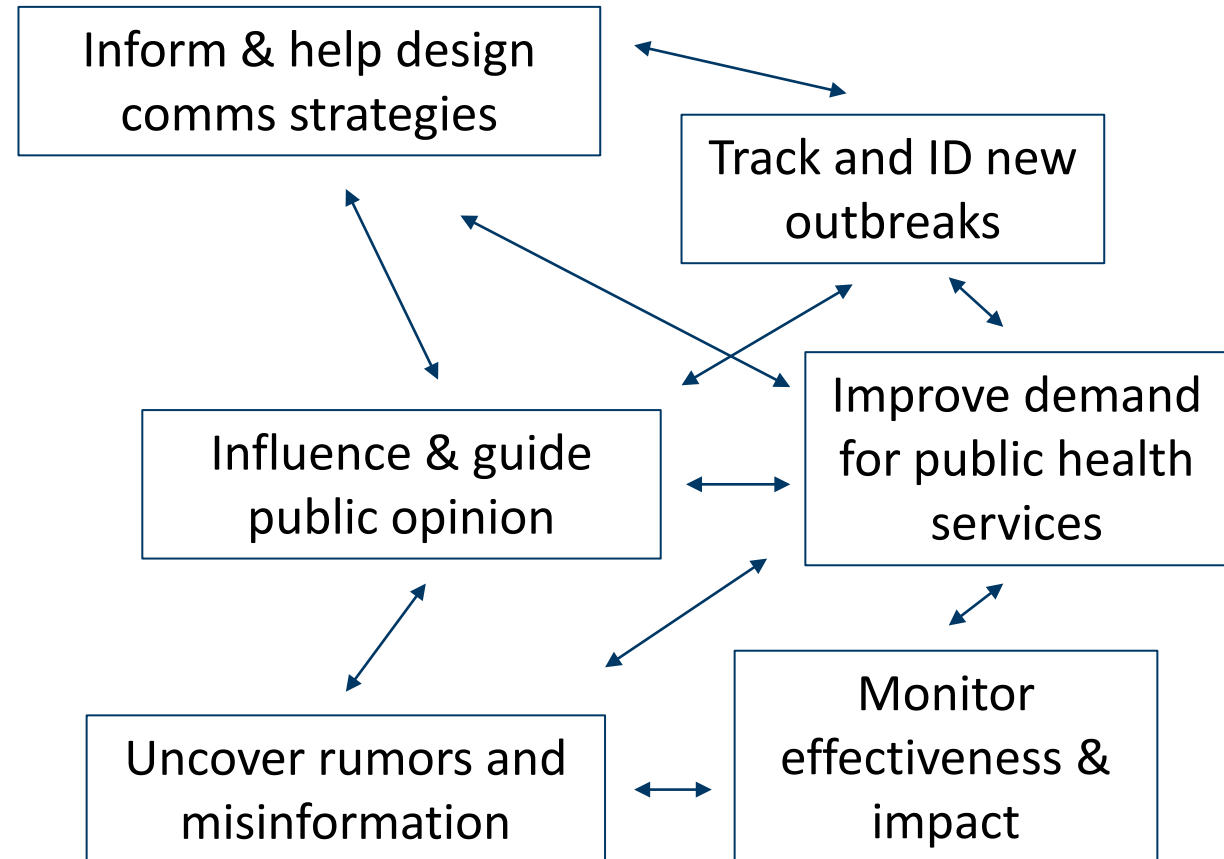
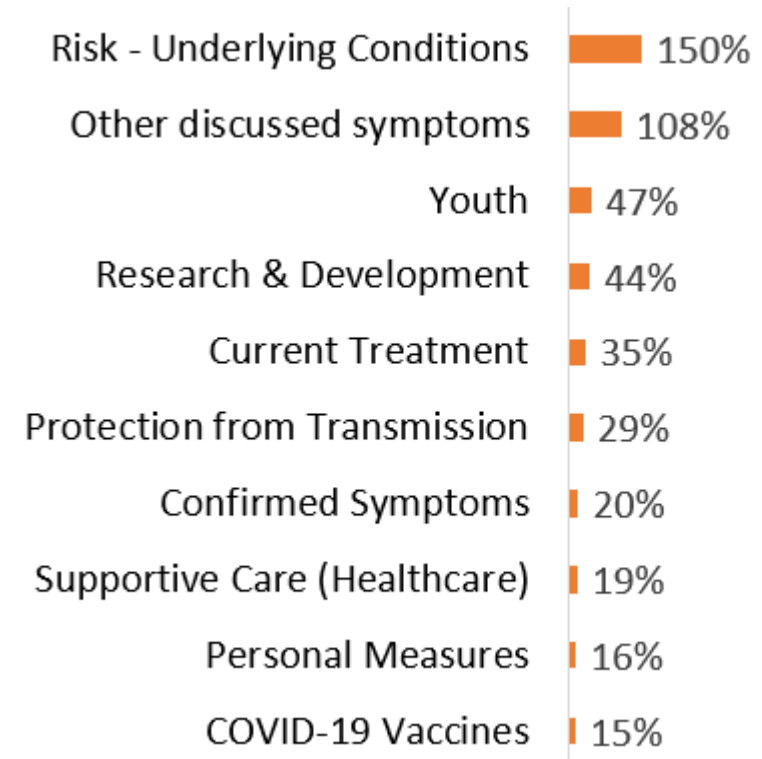Utilize data and insights collected to inform decision-making:

- Plan, define outcomes, and desired impacts accordingly
- Identify topics and channels of interest
- Monitor to identify key rumor and misinformation narratives, spreaders, and the extent of spread
- Analyze data and insights, and update communication strategy

How to / steps to take to identify potential rumors and misinformation:

- Monitor weekly velocity of topics of interest to **detect a surge of online interest**

- Direct focus to the topics that have a **high velocity rate**

- Contextualize the interest surge using **human analysis** to determine cause/rationale/other factors

Top rising topics

Topic	%
Risk - Underlying Conditions	150%
Other discussed symptoms	108%
Youth	47%
Research & Development	44%
Current Treatment	35%
Protection from Transmission	29%
Confirmed Symptoms	20%
Supportive Care (Healthcare)	19%
Personal Measures	16%
COVID-19 Vaccines	15%

Online tools

➤ Direct on platforms (Facebook, X, etc.)

➤ Online tools and simple search functionality

➤ Discussions that identify trending topics (e.g., health workers, community leaders)

➤ Online tools like Google Trends, Meltwater, CrowdTangle, and others automate the collection of large amounts of data that can be aggregated, analyzed, and visualized

* The tools mentioned should not be viewed as a recommendation or endorsement. Consult with your local health department about the availability and use of tools and resources available in your area.

Indexed Google searches represented over a specific time period

➢ Search for a key word, phrase or topic (created by Google to include synonyms for same concept)

➢ Identify change in search interest **over time**

➢ Identify specific **peaks** in search interest
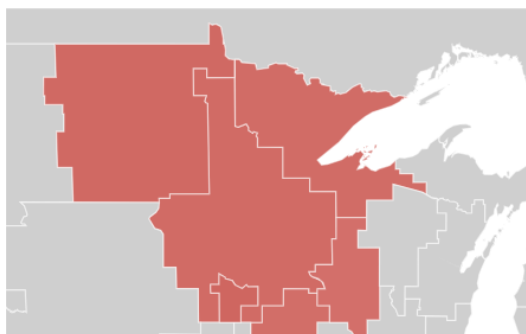
Example of COVID-19 and mpox in Minnesota in 2022
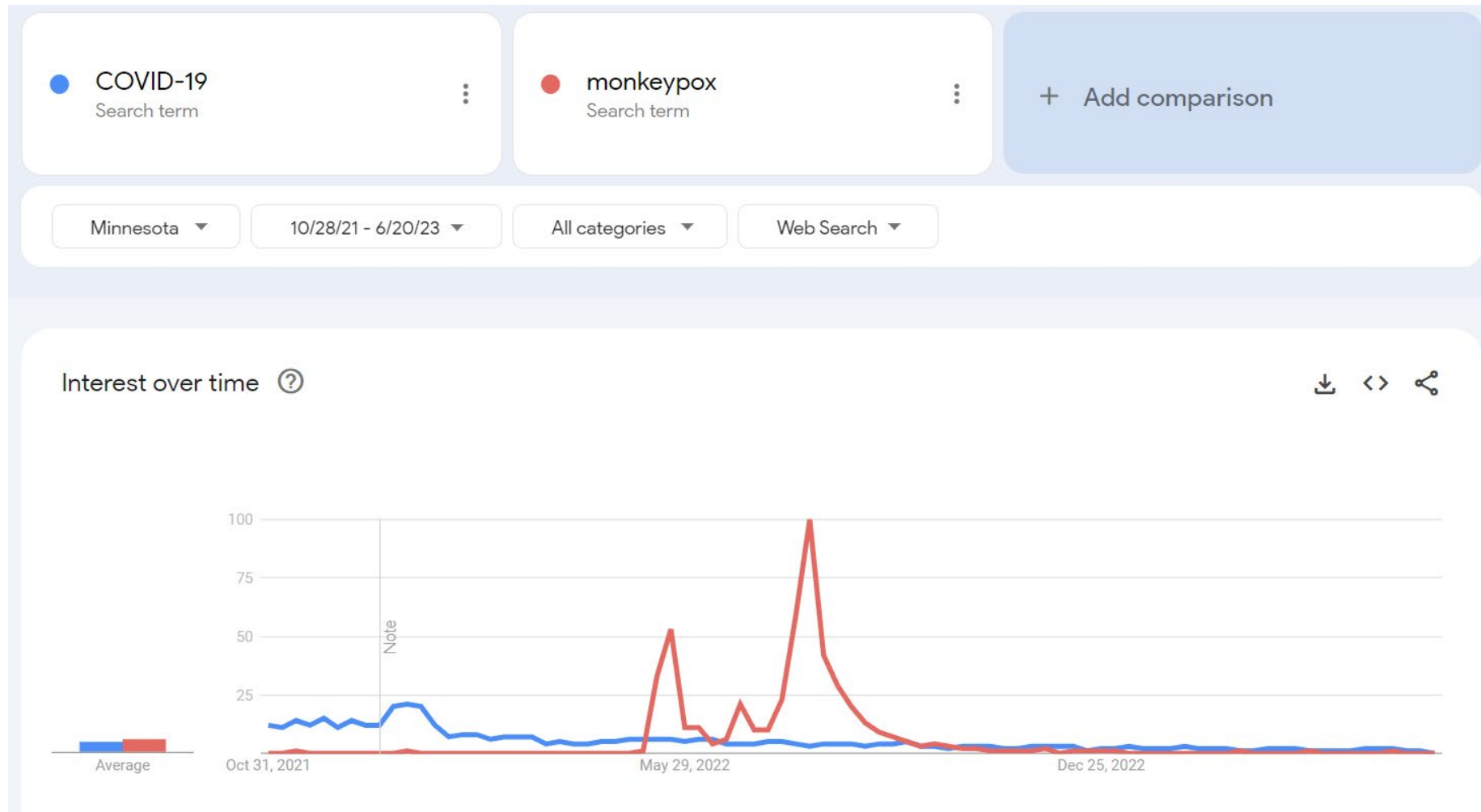
Example of COVID-19 and mpox in Minnesota in 2022

➢ Compare volume of key term/topic mentions - breakdown by **counties or areas**

➢ Which areas are driving the search interest?

➢ Is there a reason?

Compared breakdown by metro

Metro ▾

● COVID-19 ● monkeypox

Color intensity represents percentage of searches LEARN MORE
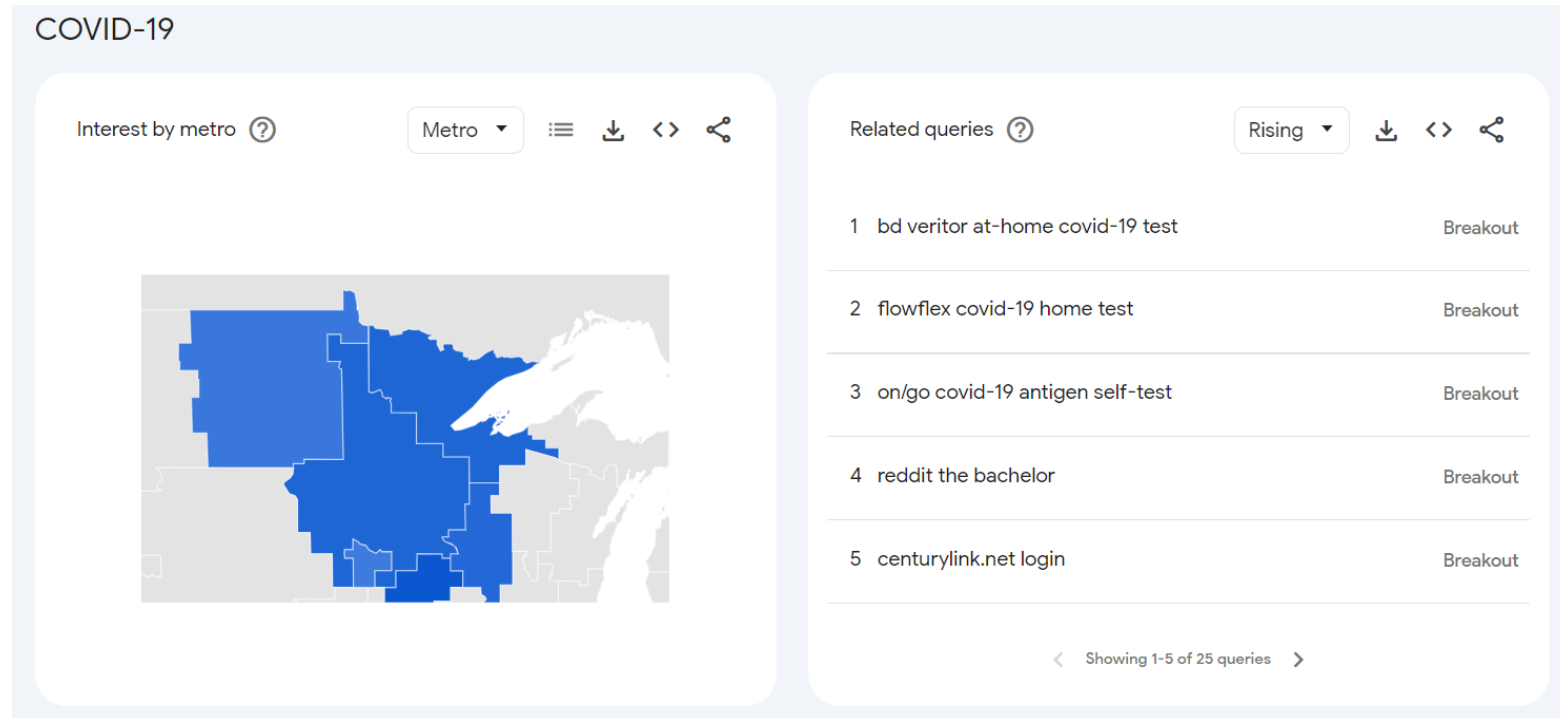
Sort: Interest for COVID-19 ▾

1	La Crosse-Eau Claire WI	
2	Rochester MN-Mason City IA-Austin MN	
3	Duluth MN-Superior WI	
4	Minneapolis-St. Paul MN	
5	Fargo-Valley City ND	

Showing 1-5 of 6 metros

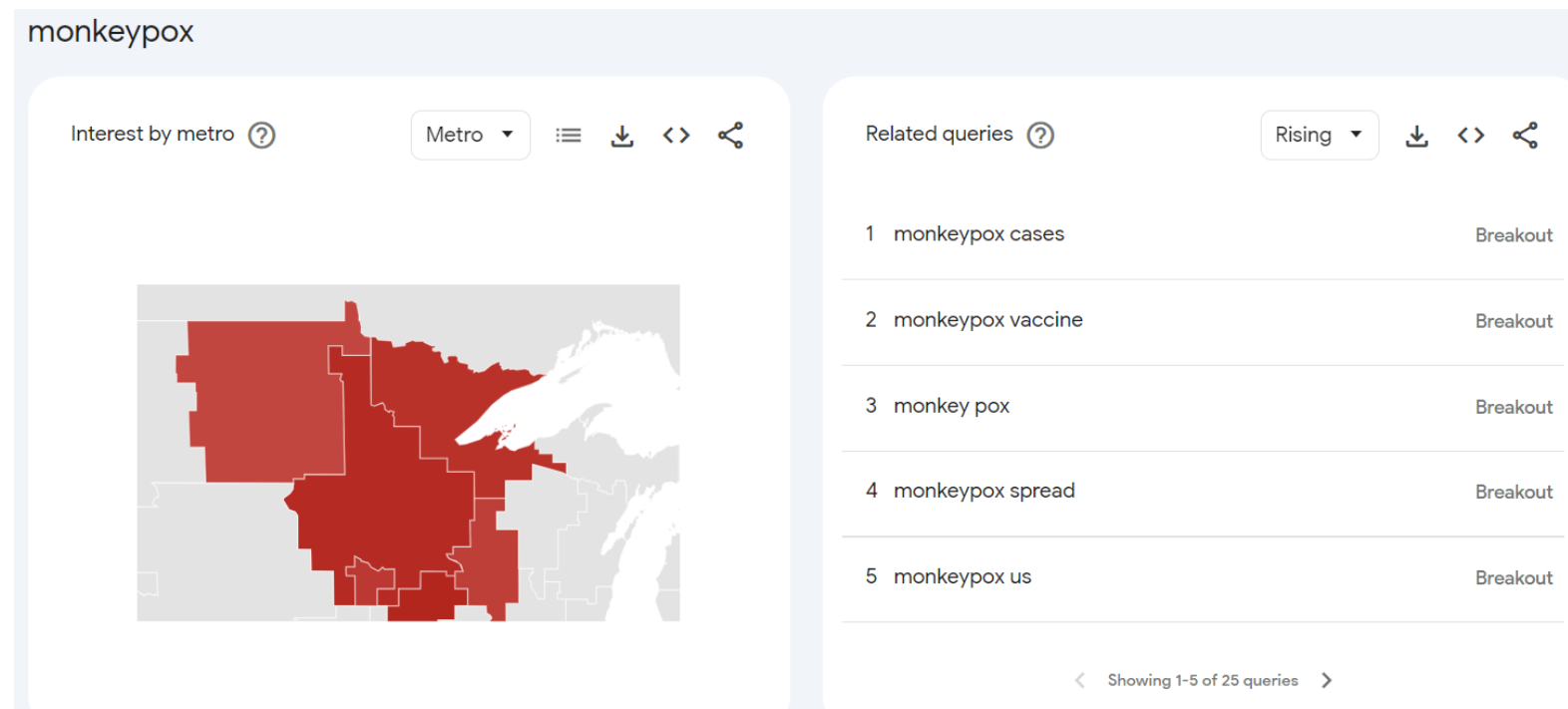**Example of COVID-19 in Minnesota in 2022**

- What queries related to the key terms/topics are people searching for?

- Identify the **fastest rising queries** in time period selected, ranging from 1% increase to breakout (breakout = +5,000%)

- Two topics related to at-home COVID tests were identified as breakouts

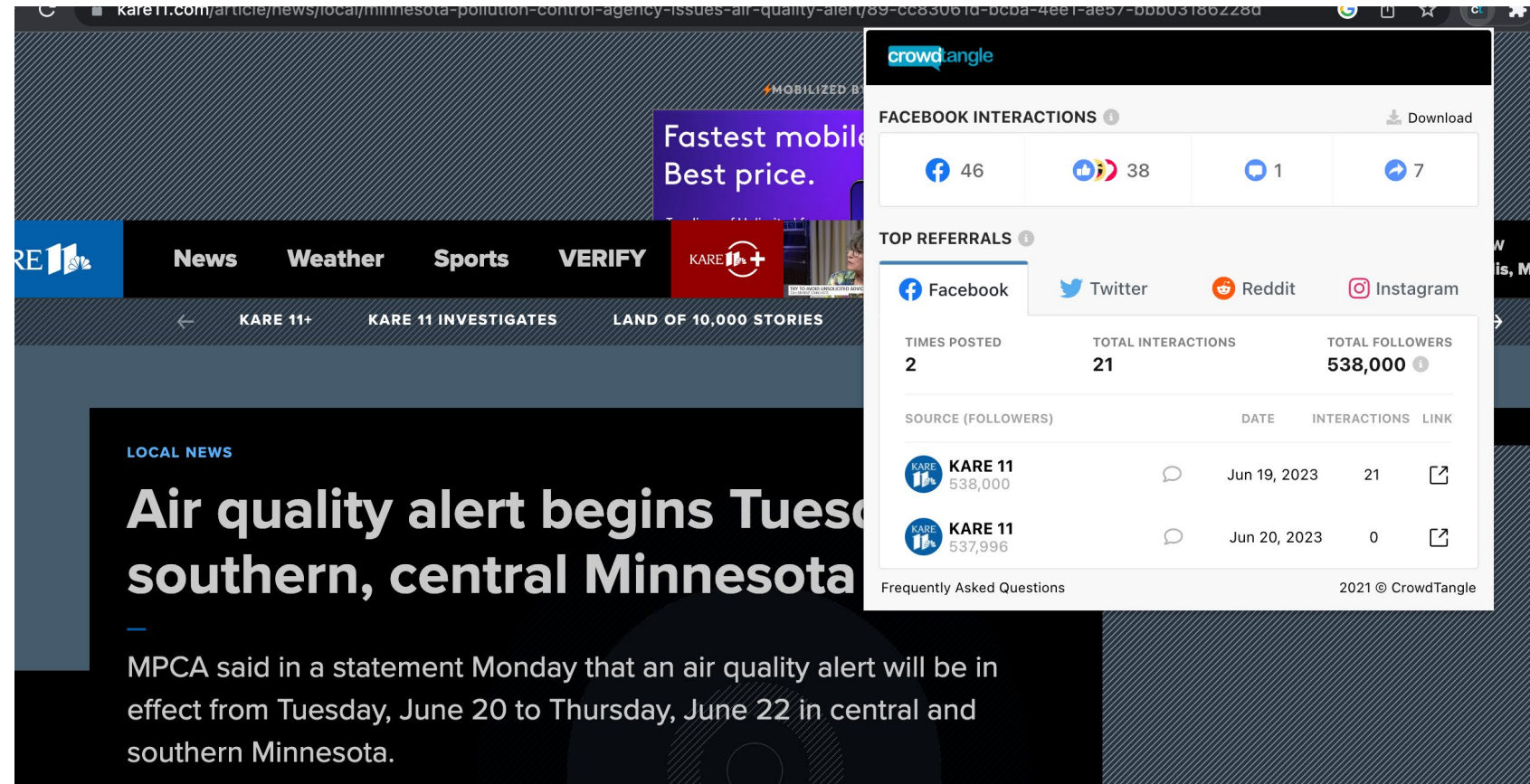**Example of mpox in Minnesota in 2022**

- Mpox cases, vaccine, and spread were identified as breakouts

- Communications response can be guided by what people are searching for

- This can include pre- and debunking related to detected rumors and misinformation

Tools: CrowdTangle

Example of air quality concerns in Minnesota in 2022

- Explore the **volume of engagements that** news articles and other website pages have generated when shared on social media

- Explore public social media posts that have shared the content

- Develop and adapt communications messaging based on what is being circulated

Group activity

In groups, based on the scenario you've been provided, determine…

➤ What rumors might you anticipate from key target audiences?

➤ How might you monitor these rumors?

➤ Which rumors are of most concern to you?

➤ What steps would you take to manage a rumor to decrease its spread/potential damage?

Instructions

➤ Your group will have 20 minutes to complete the tasks above
➤ Identify a person to report out and provide a short (<3 min) summary to the larger group

Exercise – Exercise - Exercise

Resources

Additional resources:

1. How to Address COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation - CDC (cdc.gov)
2. How to Conduct a Rapid Community Assessment - CDC (cdc.gov)
3. Public health taxonomy for social listening on monkeypox conversations - World Health Organization (who.int)
4. WHO and UNICEF training: Social Listening and Integrated Analysis - YouTube

![Minnesota Department of Health logo]

Thank You!

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