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Russia's HIV Epidemic is Growing, Affecting Older Citizens — Watchdog

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HIV infections are on the rise and are increasingly affecting Russia's older population, according to a consumer watchdog report cited by the RBC news website.

More than 1.2 million people live with HIV in Russia, a figure experts say is likely underreported and that the World Health Organization warns is at risk of spinning out of control. The crisis has led to the deaths of some 318,000 Russians since the first HIV case was registered three decades ago, with almost 37,000 of these deaths happening last year.

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Over 1 percent of the general population in 13 Russian regions was living with HIV in 2018, said a Federal Consumer Protection Service, or Rospotrebnadzor, report cited by RBC Wednesday. That's up from nine regions with 1 percent or more HIV-infected Russians the last time data was published in 2015.

“The population doesn’t use condoms, their sales are falling,” Vadim Pokrovsky, the head of Rospotrebnadzor’s AIDS prevention research center, told RBC.

While new HIV cases are declining, with 87,700 infections registered in 2018, the reported share of those infected through heterosexual contact has grown to more than half in the past two years.

Related article: Russia Risks HIV Epidemic as Cases Rise, Experts Warn

Moreover, seven out of 10 new HIV cases are among economically active Russians aged between 30 and 50, Rospotrebnadzor’s report cited by RBC said.

“People aged 50 and over practice many forms of risky behavior typically prevalent among young people,” Pokrovsky told RBC.

The Health Ministry argued that the rise in HIV infections shouldn’t be viewed as a negative thing, as it indicates that fewer people die from complications linked with the disease, Interfax quoted the ministry as saying.

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