

## **Explosion Hits Russian Lab That Houses Smallpox, Ebola Viruses**

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## **Vladimir Zinin / TASS**

An explosion has hit a disease research center in Siberia that houses strains of Ebola and smallpox, causing a fire and <u>injuring</u> one worker.

The Vector State Research Center of Virology and Biotechnology announced Monday that a gas tank erupted during repairs in a sanitary inspection room at its lab in Koltsovo, Novosibirsk region. One worker was hospitalized with burn injuries, the state-run TASS news agency reported.

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Vector, along with Russia's consumer protection <u>watchdog</u> and the <u>town's mayor</u>, were quick to stress that biohazard substances weren't present at the time of the blast and said the explosion does not pose a threat to the community.

"No work with biological materials was carried out in the building," Vector <u>said</u> in an online statement.

Vector is one of two places on Earth <u>known</u> to store samples of the live smallpox virus. The other sample of the deadly pathogen is stored at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta.

It <u>completed trials</u> of an Ebola vaccine earlier this year. A Vector researcher <u>died</u> there in 2004 after pricking herself with a needle carrying the virus, <u>raising</u> concerns about safety and secrecy.

A 2016 World Health Organization inspection <u>said</u> Vector met biosafety and biosecurity standards, but inspectors had "requested further work on some issues."

The former head of Vector <u>vanished</u> in 2017 following accusations of fraud and a Soviet defector <u>claimed</u> in the early 1990s that smallpox strains were moved there for bioweapons research.

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