

Explosion Hits Russian Lab That Houses Smallpox, Ebola Viruses

September 17, 2019



Vladimir Zinin / TASS

An explosion has hit a disease research center in Siberia that houses strains of Ebola and smallpox, causing a fire and [injuring](#) 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 [watchdog](#) and the [town's mayor](#), 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 [said](#) in an online statement.

Vector is one of two places on Earth [known](#) 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 [completed trials](#) of an Ebola vaccine earlier this year. A Vector researcher [died](#) there in 2004 after pricking herself with a needle carrying the virus, [raising](#) concerns about safety and secrecy.

A 2016 World Health Organization inspection [said](#) Vector met biosafety and biosecurity standards, but inspectors had “requested further work on some issues.”

The former head of Vector [vanished](#) in 2017 following accusations of fraud and a Soviet defector [claimed](#) in the early 1990s that smallpox strains were moved there for bioweapons research.

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