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Putin Extends Nationwide Paid Holiday as Coronavirus Numbers See Sharpest Rise Yet

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Putin said he would delegate decisionmaking power on anti-coronavirus measures to regional authorities. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

President Vladimir Putin announced the extension of Russia's nationwide "non-working week" until April 30 after the country registered a sharp increase in coronavirus cases on Thursday.

Confirmed coronavirus cases in Russia spiked overnight with 771 new cases registered across the country, bringing official totals to 3,548 infections and 30 deaths.

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Speaking in a televised address, Putin said the paid non-working week, originally scheduled from March 28 to April 5, "won us time" to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

Putin added that he would delegate the decisionmaking power on anti-coronavirus measures to regional authorities given the regional differences in infection rates.

Thursday's announcement comes after health officials on Wednesday called for an extension to the week off to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

“We could make additional decisions depending on how the situation develops. If circumstances allow, we will shorten the required non-working days,” Putin said.

Dozens of regions throughout Russia have gone into lockdown this week as part of new preventative measures against COVID-19.

Moscow, a city of more than 12 million residents, introduced strict isolation rules on Monday, with authorities ordering people to stay home except for emergencies.

The lack of any further policies or announcement of a broad stimulus package to support the economy and businesses — as has been seen in many other countries battling the coronavirus — could create yet more uncertainty among employers over who will cover the costs of a month-long shutdown. Firms were already struggling under the toll of a weeklong national holiday as businesses reported sharp drops in revenue, with surveys showing one-third have already started laying off workers or cutting hours.

So far, the Kremlin's package of support has focused on interest-free loans and short-term tax holidays. Businesses have repeatedly called for help with more substantial payments, such as salaries for workers now at home and rent payments.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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