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Russia Braces for Veterans-Free Victory Day Due to Coronavirus – Reports

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Questions have swirled over when and whether Russia would hold the massive military parade in Red Square to mark the 75th anniversary of Victory Day on May 9 as the coronavirus has shut down major events around the world. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

Russia could stage its annual celebration of the Soviet victory in World War II without veterans because of coronavirus next month, according to its organizers' letter cited by Russian media Monday.

Questions have swirled over when and whether Russia would hold the massive military parade in Red Square to mark the 75th anniversary of Victory Day on May 9 as the virus has shut down major events around the world. Russian troops have been filmed rehearsing for the parade outside Moscow as recently as Monday.

Related article: Russia Eyes Victory Day Parade With Empty Stands as Coronavirus Crisis Continues

This year's organizers have asked the government to refrain from inviting veterans to Victory Day events, according to a letter tweeted by Alexei Venediktov, the chief editor of the Ekho Moskvy radio station.

The letter notes that guests over 65 years old should not attend the 75th anniversary commemorations "over the threat to the life and health of citizens due to the spread of the coronavirus." People over the age of 65 are considered more vulnerable to the deadly virus.

Russia has confirmed 6,343 coronavirus infections and 47 deaths as of Monday.

Interfax confirmed the authenticity of presidential adviser and event organizer Anton Kobyakov's March 27 letter to the cabinet of ministers with the Kremlin.

Previous reports suggested that Russia was considering a range of options, including staging the parade in front of empty stands or rescheduling it to later in the year. In addition to the previously mentioned Sept. 2 and Nov. 7 dates, the Znak.com news outlet cited an unnamed source close to the Kremlin as saying that the parade could be held on June 24.

The Kremlin said last week it still plans to go ahead with the May 9 parade, but noted that "the situation is being monitored."

President Vladimir Putin had invited a number of world leaders, including U.S. President Donald Trump, to attend Victory Day's 75th anniversary commemoration this year.

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