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Yandex Offers Free Coronavirus Tests in Moscow as City Bears the Brunt of Russia's Outbreak

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Moscow, a city of more than 12.5 million, accounts for more than half of Russia's 52,763 coronavirus cases and 456 deaths. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Russian tech giant Yandex said Monday that it will offer free coronavirus tests to everyone in Moscow as the city grapples with a rapid rise in infections.

Moscow, a city of more than 12.5 million, accounts for more than half of Russia's 52,763 coronavirus cases and 456 deaths. Yandex previously said that only Muscovites aged 65 and older would be eligible for the free tests.

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"People who keep working and ensuring a safe life for citizens in this difficult time — on the streets, in shops, in social facilities, in delivery — should be tested," Yandex managing

director Tigran Khudaverdyan said.

“That’s why we decided to conduct all testing for free,” he said in a statement.

Its offer is part of a wide-ranging assistance program, with support from the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), that provides medical and social services during the outbreak. Yandex said it will finance the testing from its own funds and donations, but did not specify its cost.

“Timely testing is an important step not only in preventing the spread of the virus, but also in minimizing its aftereffects and helping to restore life and economic activity back to normal throughout the country as soon as possible,” said RDIF head Kirill Dmitriyev.

Participants seeking a free Covid-19 test are invited to fill out a form on the program’s website. A worker from one of Yandex's partner laboratories will then go to the person's residence and collect a nasal swab.

The tech firm said it has donated 10,000 coronavirus tests through the program so far.

Yandex said it plans to expand the free tests to other Russian regions “in the future.”

Russia's number of coronavirus infections, which is still relatively low compared to western European countries, has drawn skepticism and Moscow health officials have warned that many coronavirus tests return false negative results.

Officials have forecast that the Russian capital will see its peak number of infections in the next two to three weeks.

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