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Russia to Adopt Moscow's Digital Pass System for Coronavirus Lockdown

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The introduction of digital passes beyond Moscow comes as health officials warn that the regions lag behind the Russian capital in new infection rates by two to three weeks on average. **Aleksander Avilov / Moskva News Agency**

At least 21 Russian regions have requested digital travel passes a week after coronavirus-hit Moscow enacted its system to enforce lockdown measures and slow the deadly outbreak, the Communications and Press Ministry said Wednesday.

Their introduction beyond Moscow comes as health officials warn that the regions lag behind the Russian capital in new infection rates by two to three weeks on average. The city of 12.5 million currently accounts for more than half of Russia's 57,999 coronavirus cases and 547 deaths.

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The rest of Russia needs digital passes "so that we could see the traffic, its volume and the travelers," Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, who also leads the Russian government's coronavirus task force, said.

"I believe [the system] can be extended... to control the movement of air, rail and intercity and inter-regional bus transport," Interfax quoted Sobyanin as saying.

Seven regions immediately surrounding Moscow will become the first to connect to the digital pass system, the communications ministry said. Fourteen other regions further afield, including in the North Caucasus, Siberia and the Far East, will introduce digital travel passes next week.

The technology will be based on a smartphone app used by the Moscow region. The region's pilot program has issued almost 1 million multiple-use passes and hands out around 400,000 single-use passes daily.

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Sobyanin warned that the regions' hospitals risk running out of beds within three to four weeks at current rates of infection.

Critics have derided the passes, which control most movement with the exception of foot travel (Muscovites are banned from walking anywhere outside grocery shops, pharmacies or to walk dogs within a 100-meter radius of their homes), as unconstitutional mass surveillance that could remain in place after the coronavirus outbreak.

Moscow's system was also heavily criticized last week when footage showed large crowds of people queued outside metro station entrances as they waited to have their passes checked.

Russia confirmed 5,236 new coronavirus infections on Wednesday, bringing the country's official number of cases to 57,999.

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