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Russia Moves to Gradually Relax Coronavirus Lockdown: Officials

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Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, the head of Russia's coronavirus task force, said the total number of cases is higher because of wider testing **Denis Grishkin / Moskva News Agency**

Russia is planning to gradually lift its restrictions on movement and certain industries imposed due to the coronavirus, officials said at a meeting with President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday.

Putin ordered officials to draw up the measures last week, before Russia saw a four-day streak of more than 10,000 coronavirus cases reported daily. The country has the world's seventh-highest number of infections at 165,929.

A non-working period is in place in Russia until May 11 and most regions have enacted their own lockdown measures.

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During Wednesday's televised meeting, Putin cautioned against acting too hastily after this deadline to avoid a new wave of infections.

"We should not run ahead of ourselves," Putin said, adding that in some regions restrictive measures should remain in place and even be tightened.

"The price of even the smallest mistake is the safety, lives and health of our people," he said. "We should be moving forward gradually."

Here's a brief look at what was discussed:

— Regional governors should draft their post-May 11 exit strategies based on recommendations from the federal government and Russia's consumer protection watchdog, Putin said. The hardest-hit regions should keep strict measures in place while others should plan to gradually ease restrictions, he said.

— Lockdown restrictions should be lifted in three stages, said Anna Popova, the head of Russia's consumer protection watchdog:

1. First, people and families should be allowed to leave their homes for outdoor exercise and small shops and service establishments should open in a limited space.
2. Next, families should be allowed to walk outside, larger shops should open with limits on visitor numbers and schools should re-open.
3. Third, parks and squares should open under social-distancing restrictions, along with all shops, educational facilities, hotels and dining establishments.

— Authorities will consider three factors when considering lifting restrictions in specific regions, Popova said: infection rates, free hospital beds and testing coverage.

— The number of seriously ill patients in Moscow, the epicenter of Russia's outbreak, has stayed largely stable over the past two weeks while the total number of cases is higher because of wider testing, said Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, the head of Russia's coronavirus task force.

— Moscow's industrial and construction companies that employ 500,000 people or more will be able to reopen starting Tuesday, May 12, Sobyanin said. The service sector should remain under strict lockdown and all others should stay in self-isolation, he said.

AFP contributed reporting.

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