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Russia Mulls Raising Legal Drinking Age After Deaths Spike

By AFP

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Over the past years there have been a number of attempts to raise the legal drinking age in Russia. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's health minister on Wednesday said it was necessary to raise the legal age to buy alcohol to 21 after an increase in drink-related deaths during the coronavirus epidemic.

"Unfortunately, the role of alcohol has begun to rise in the death count during this period," Mikhail Murashko told parliament.

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Lawmakers should pass legislation that would raise the legal age to buy alcohol from 18 to 21, he said. "This could be done already today."

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Russia.

Although he did not provide any figures, Murashko said the number of alcohol-related deaths had increased during the coronavirus outbreak. Compared to women of the same age, men's mortality was higher from the age of 18 onwards, he added.

Despite Russia's reputation for hard drinking, alcoholism has for years been on the wane, thanks in part to anti-drink campaigns and aggressive moves by the authorities to control sales.

But experts and campaigners have recently pointed to worrying signs that Russians may be reviving their old habits under the stress of the pandemic and the measure taken to limit its spread.

Alcohol purchases jumped after authorities imposed lockdown orders in late March, with sales in the first week of isolation rising, according to one study by market research group GfK.

Russia has now reported 242,271 cases of coronavirus, becoming on Tuesday the second worst-affected country after the United States.

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