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Siberian Ambulance Crews Vow Hunger Strike Over Putin's Unpaid Virus Bonuses

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Thursday marked Putin's deadline to hand out April bonuses of up to 80,000 rubles ($1,100) to all medics treating Covid-19 patients. **Sergei Fadeichev / TASS**

Ambulance workers in western Siberia have threatened to go on hunger strike if they don't receive President Vladimir Putin's promised payouts for working with coronavirus patients.

Thursday marked Putin's deadline to hand out April bonuses of up to 80,000 rubles ($1,100) to all medics treating Covid-19 patients. Russia's prime minister acknowledged this week that regional authorities have only paid out 4.5 billion rubles ($57 million) of the 27 billion rubles ($343 million) in funds from the federal government.

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But ambulance workers in the Kemerovo region said in a video address to Putin that only those who hospitalize patients with confirmed cases have been paid since.

“All the others were left without money,” the ambulance workers in the town of Anzhero-Sudzhensk almost 4,000 kilometers east of Moscow said.

“If the payments are due, why aren’t they delivered properly? Why do we always have to prove something to everyone?” one worker said.

Related article: Russia’s Ambulance Crews Are Running on Empty as They Fight Coronavirus

The ambulance crews also complained of having to reuse protective gowns and sew their own face masks.

They warned they will go on a hunger strike next Monday if they don’t get paid, the Tayga.info news website reported.

Kemerovo governor Sergei Tsivilev’s social media team said he has received their complaint and is “working on it.” Regional health authorities said the ambulance crews don’t qualify for the bonuses because they don’t deal directly with Covid-19 patients.

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On Friday, Putin reiterated his calls to pay medics in full and vowed to return to the issue next week.

More than 100,000 people have signed a petition by the Deistviye (Action) union of medical workers demanding full payouts and wider eligibility for the bonuses since it was launched last week.

Russia has the world’s second-highest number of coronavirus infections with 262,843 confirmed cases as of Friday.

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