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Russia to Stop Counting Asymptomatic Coronavirus Cases, Deaths – Health Ministry

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Health experts say that asymptomatic transmission of the coronavirus is common. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Russia will no longer include asymptomatic coronavirus patients in its daily count of new infections and deaths, the Health Ministry said Wednesday.

Russia has confirmed 379,051 coronavirus infections as of Thursday, the world's third-highest number of cases. Its official death toll of 4,142 is one of the lowest among countries with similarly high cases.

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More than 40% of these cases have had "no clinical signs," Russia's coronavirus crisis center has said in its daily updates over the past several weeks.

“If the virus is detected alongside an absence of complaints, the condition should be considered a virus carrier,” said the Health Ministry’s guidelines released Wednesday.

“Such cases are not included in sickness and mortality statistics,” the document reads.

“In cases where a person’s death with Covid-19 occurred from an accident or certain other acute diseases, such cases are not considered deaths from Covid-19,” it adds.

Health experts say that asymptomatic transmission of the coronavirus is common and recent studies have suggested a higher share of asymptomatic Covid-19 cases than previously thought. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that as many as 35% of coronavirus cases are asymptomatic and says that asymptomatic carriers are just as infectious as those with symptoms.

A study of 78 patients in Wuhan, the Chinese city where the pandemic originated, said that asymptomatic carriers were contagious for a shorter period of time.

The Health Ministry's guidelines follow questions surrounding Russia’s relatively low Covid-19 death toll. Authorities have defended the accuracy of their mortality data, with Moscow officials saying more than 60% of deaths among its coronavirus patients aren't being included in the city’s official virus death toll because they were determined to have died of other causes. Russian officials have since warned that the death toll in May would be significantly higher.

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