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Putin Zeroes in on New Virus Hotspot in Far East Russia

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The Russian military has set up 16 field hospitals across the country as the outbreak spreads outside Moscow. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

President Vladimir Putin has ordered the military to set up a field hospital in a Far East Russian region he described as the latest coronavirus hotspot as Russia's outbreak continues to shift outside Moscow.

Putin shifted his focus to the remote Zabaikalsky region of 1 million residents some 5,000 kilometers east of Moscow two weeks after intervening in the epidemic sweeping the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan.

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"I'd like to draw your attention to the growth of cases in the Zabaikalsky region. The situation there is still difficult," Putin said in a televised Russian Security Council session.

“I ask the defense minister to immediately begin deploying a hospital in the Zabaikalsky region fitted with all the needed equipment and specialists,” Putin said.

Unlike Dagestan, the Zabaikalsky region is among Russia’s least-affected regions with 1,257 coronavirus cases and 24 deaths out of more than 441,000 cases and almost 5,400 deaths nationwide. It has reported an average of 44 daily Covid-19 cases compared to Dagestan’s 125 cases over the past 10 days.

The Defense Ministry announced later Thursday it will deploy a 100-bed field hospital in the Zabaikalsky region from the neighboring republic of Buryatia.

The Russian military has set up 16 field hospitals across the country since the start of the country's Covid-19 outbreak in March. Russia also faced questions over its geopolitical motivations after sending an aid package to Italy and providing ventilators to the United States.

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