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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

St. Petersburg's Mortality Spikes by 30% in May – Official Data

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Russian officials have warned that the country could see a spike in mortality in May due to the coronavirus. **Sophia Sandurskaya / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's second-largest city St. Petersburg recorded almost 30% more deaths in May 2020 compared to its average May total over the past decade, official data said Wednesday.

St. Petersburg saw 6,427 deaths in May this year, about 28% more than the nine-year average of 5,027 for May, according to civil registry data.

Related article: Moscow Sees 20% Surge in Mortality in April: Official Data

The figures, first published by Reuters, suggest that more people may have died from Covid-19 in St. Petersburg last month than its officially reported toll of 171. Russian officials have warned that the country could see a spike in mortality in May, around two to three weeks after infections peaked in late April.

St. Petersburg's mortality data comes after Moscow health authorities more than doubled the Russian capital's April coronavirus death count last week.

The numbers follow weeks of questions surrounding Russia's relatively low coronavirus death rate of around 1% despite having the world's third-highest number of cases. Major Western outlets faced accusations of spreading fake news after reporting that Russia's coronavirus-related deaths could be 70% higher than officially confirmed.

St. Petersburg's health committee also announced Wednesday that it would change its methodology for counting coronavirus fatalities, which it said would speed up reporting. Russia's Health Ministry announced last week that it would no longer include asymptomatic coronavirus patients in its daily count of new infections and deaths.

Alexei Yakovlev, infectious diseases department head at St. Petersburg State University, told Reuters that "pretty much all recent pneumonia deaths" can be traced to Covid-19.

"There have never been so many cases of pneumonia, not ever," Yakovlev was quoted as saying.

"And since there's no other flu or infection going around right now, it leads one to believe that [the figures] are due to the coronavirus," he added.

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