The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Major Russian Cities Postpone Victory Day Parades Over Virus Fears

June 11, 2020



Putin initially delayed the Victory Day parade from May 9 to June 24 because of the coronavirus. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

At least 10 Russian cities have further postponed a landmark military parade meant to mark the 75th anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War II because of coronavirus fears, the Znak.com news website reported Thursday.

President Vladimir Putin delayed the Victory Day parade from May 9, when tanks usually roll through Red Square while jets fly overhead, to June 24 because of the coronavirus. Russia's Covid-19 outbreak — which surpassed half a million cases Thursday — has shifted from Moscow to other regions and the capital has begun to gradually emerge from its lockdown.

Related article: Russia Says Only 'Coronavirus Immune' Troops Will March at Victory Day Parade

Authorities in the Belgorod and Oryol regions southwest of Moscow have delayed their

parades until July 12 and Aug. 5, respectively, according to Znak.com. The neighboring Kursk region timed its parade to coincide with the end of the Battle of Kursk on Aug. 23.

The Perm region east of Moscow will hold its parade on or around Sept. 3. "We need to take care of the health and life of [our people]," its governor was quoted as saying.

Other cities that opted out of the parade include 2018 World Cup host Saransk, as well as Pskov, Yaroslavl, Orenburg, Nizhny Tagil and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.

Russia's defense minister, who informed Putin on Thursday that everything was ready for the parade, has pledged that only asymptomatic troops and those who have developed immunity to Covid-19 would take part in the marches in 28 cities.

The commander-in-chief of Russia's Ground Forces, Oleg Salyukov, had noted that other cities would decide whether or not to host parades based on the severity of their Covid-19 situations.

Before it was postponed, this year's May 9 parade was meant to be a major showcase for Putin with world leaders and World War II veterans invited to watch and take part in events.

At least 12 foreign leaders, mostly from former Soviet republics, are expected to attend the June 24 parade.

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https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/06/11/major-russian-cities-postpone-victory-day-parades-over-virus-fears-a70555