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Russian Official Says 489 Medics Died From Coronavirus

By Anna Malpas for AFP

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President Vladimir Putin has acknowledged problems in supplying personal protective equipment to medics. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Nearly 500 Russian medics who tested positive for the coronavirus have died, the head of the state health watchdog said Thursday, a far higher figure than given before.

"489 — that is medics, unfortunately we have lost almost 500 of our colleagues," Roszdravnadzor watchdog chief Alla Samoilova said at an online conference on safety for medics organized by her agency.

Related article: Russian, Belarussian Doctors Count Their Own Dead From Coronavirus

Previously a Health Ministry official on May 26 gave a death toll of 101.

Samoilova's agency later backtracked, with its press service saying in a statement sent to

Russian news agencies that the figure she gave was "not official" and was based on "data circulating on the internet."

An independent website set up by medics where colleagues report deaths, the Remembrance List, lists 444 deaths among health workers in Russia.

"Could we have done something more for prevention (of medics' deaths)? Probably yes," Samoilova said.

President Vladimir Putin has acknowledged problems in supplying personal protective equipment (PPE) to medics.

Samoilova also cited this as a factor, while stressing the situation is now much better.

"The country wasn't ready, there was too little PPE," she said.

"If I'm being honest, there were issues at the start, there were some shortcomings."

"Far from all (hospital) heads... supplied workers with PPE. Sometimes there simply wasn't any, there weren't any deliveries. There was this problem."

However she added that "as of today we practically don't receive complaints that medics don't have supplies of PPE, that medics don't get tested."

The watchdog chief also said there was initially "a low level of epidemiological safety" in medical facilities hastily adapted for coronavirus patients.

"It wasn't always possible to separate red zones" for infected patients as hospitals departments were reorganized, she said.

"What did the pandemic teach us? It taught us that we have to create a safety culture among medics," she said.

Former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, now head of the Audit Chamber, said this month that "medicine is significantly underfunded."

Hospitals had "outdated" buildings and lacked equipment and drugs, Samoilova said.

"There were no ventilators, oxygen supply systems weren't always hooked up, there weren't enough medicines," she added.

"Today the system looks completely different."

Samoilova praised medics who she said "even in this situation showed themselves to be heroes."

"They immediately threw themselves into the red zones, not thinking that they could get sick, that they could lose their lives."

Russia has reported a total of 7,660 deaths from coronavirus, counting only cases where the virus was listed as the main cause of death.

It has the world's third-highest number of confirmed cases with 561,091, including 7,790 over the last 24 hours, a figure that has fallen over this month.

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