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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Moscow Announces Two-Week School Break to Contain Coronavirus

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Russian schools resumed in-person classes for the new school year on Sept. 1. **Andrey Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

Moscow schoolchildren will stay home for an extra week this fall break in order to slow the renewed spread of the coronavirus, Mayor Sergei Sobyanin announced Tuesday.

The measures come as the Russian capital's daily Covid-19 caseload has risen from 625 to 2,300 since the beginning of September, stoking fears of a second wave. Officials have linked the rise to lax compliance with health guidelines layered onto the seasonal flu outbreak, but maintained that Russia was still in the middle of its first wave.

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"On the recommendation of health officers, considering the fall increase in colds and the rise of detected Covid[-19] infections, I have decided to extend the fall holidays," Sobyanin said, ordering all Moscow schools to go on holiday between Oct. 5-18.

The usual weeklong fall break was extended "in order to avoid unnecessary contacts during this period and not expose children to the risk of disease," the mayor wrote on his website.

Kindergartens will remain open during that period.

Russian schools resumed in-person classes for the new school year on Sept. 1. Since then, several schools across the country have gone into quarantine over local Covid-19 outbreaks.

The head of Russia's consumer protection watchdog said Monday that "there are no sick students" in the country, but noted that around 2% of the "absolutely healthy" tested children are carriers of the virus.

In his blog, Sobyanin urged children to stay home and to avoid shopping malls and public transport during the extended holiday.

"When they come home, they very easily transmit the virus to adults and elderly family members who get more seriously ill," he wrote.

"Let's use the holidays as an opportunity to slow the disease rate and preserve our health."

Russian education authorities have maintained that they will not return to remote learning, which was introduced at the start of the pandemic in the spring, despite the rise in Covid-19 cases.

Russia has the world's fourth-highest number of coronavirus infections at 1.16 million.

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