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Russia Virus Cases Approach May High in 'Serious' Upturn

By AFP

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Russia on Monday recorded a rise in coronavirus cases close to the maximum level in May but it has stopped short of reimposing strict lockdown measures.

With the fourth-highest number of cases in the global pandemic, Russia introduced harsh measures during the first outbreak of the virus including the closure of borders from March while Muscovites had to apply for electronic passes to travel round the city.

On Monday, the government confirmed 10,888 new cases, approaching the May 11 highest recorded level of 11,656.

Of these, 3,537 were in the capital, the worst-hit city by far, where Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said Sunday there are "many seriously ill."

Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said Friday that a sharp upturn in cases since late

September was "serious" but added that "we expected this," the TASS state news agency reported.

She cited people returning to workplaces and the rise in flu and pneumonia cases generally expected in autumn and winter.

In Moscow, the mayor has introduced some measures to slow the infection rate, telling those over 65 to stay at home and requiring companies to have at least 30 percent of staff working from home from Monday.

These measures fall far short of the tight lockdown that reached its height in Moscow in March. The capital saw its highest daily level of new cases in May, at 6,703, much higher than the current figure.

"I imagine a full self-isolation regime won't be reintroduced in Russia," Senator Valery Ryazansky told the RIA Novosti state news agency on Monday.

However he warned that a full border closure was possible.

"Of course we can close the Russia border. We are coming to this," he said.

Fears over the impact of the virus, among other factors, have hit the ruble, which last month slumped to its lowest level against the euro since 2016.

Russia has recorded 21,475 virus deaths.

It approved a vaccine called Sputnik V in August, claiming a world first, although large-scale clinical trials are continuing. Another Russian vaccine is also undergoing trials.

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