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Russia to Probe Virus Deaths Caused By Oxygen Shortage

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At least 13 coronavirus patients were reported to have died when their oxygen supply ran out at a hospital in southern Russia. **Vladimir Gerdo / TASS**

At least 13 coronavirus patients were reported to have died when their oxygen supply ran out at a hospital in southern Russia last week.

Russia's health watchdog said Wednesday that its affiliate in the Rostov region was looking into the reports that the patients died due to a lack of oxygen in their hospital on Oct. 12. The Kremlin said it was confident that regional authorities would conduct an urgent investigation into the "alarming" report.

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"Oxygen was lacking constantly, but [that day] we didn't have it for two hours on all floors," an unnamed senior health official told Rostov-on-Don's 161.ru news website.

“Even those who had oxygen were gasping for air like fish thrown out of the water,” the official in the city 1,000 kilometers south of Moscow said.

Health authorities said an autopsy would determine the causes of the patients’ deaths, five of whom were reported to be in intensive care.

An unnamed hospital worker told 161.ru that some of the patients “would have died anyway” from complications, but added that at least three of them could have been saved had oxygen been still available.

The outlet reported, citing medics, that this was not the first time that patients died at the Rostov-on-Don City Hospital No. 20 after oxygen supplies ran out. Hospital staffers have to regularly redistribute the oxygen among its critical patients, 161.ru reported.

Rostov-on-Don’s administration acknowledged the rising number of Covid-19 hospitalizations but denied that lack of oxygen was to blame for the 13 deaths on Oct. 12.

“There were no emergencies with oxygen supplies on those days that could have led to the patients’ deaths,” the city’s deputy mayor for social issues Yelena Kozhukhova said.

On Thursday, the Rostov region’s administration said medical oxygen suppliers are meeting local hospitals’ needs and are running a surplus.

The Rostov region is Russia’s sixth most-affected federal subject with 27,840 total Covid-19 cases and 704 deaths confirmed by the national coronavirus information center.

Russia has reported record numbers of new infections and deaths over the past week as disease experts warn that its regions could see a second wave that is 10 times worse than the first.

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