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Russia Passes 60K Coronavirus Deaths

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The second wave of the coronavirus this fall and winter has hit Russia hard. **Kirill Kukhmar / TASS**

Russia surpassed 60,000 confirmed coronavirus deaths Thursday, according to daily official figures.

National task force figures showed 506 new deaths and 23,541 infections detected in the past 24 hours. Autopsy-based statistics suggest the official death toll is a fraction of the true number.

A total of 3,332,142 cases and 60,457 fatalities have been registered in Russia since the start of the pandemic, around half of Russia's state statistics agency Rosstat's own estimate of 116,000 coronavirus-related deaths, not including December fatalities.

Medics, statisticians and demographers have questioned Russia's official Covid-19 fatality numbers since the start of the outbreak in spring, suggesting an effort to downplay its impact.

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Rosstat also recorded almost 230,000 more deaths in January-November than during the same period in 2019. Authorities say 81%, or 186,000, fatalities resulted from the virus.

That excess mortality, seen as a more reliable indicator of how many people could have succumbed to the virus, would put Russia in third place for Covid-19 deaths in the world. Task force figures put Russia in eighth place for total Covid-19 deaths.

President Vladimir Putin has for months played up Russia's lower death rate compared to western countries as the Kremlin resisted reintroducing nationwide lockdowns that battered the economy during the first wave.

The second wave of the coronavirus this fall and winter has hit Russia hard, including regions outside Moscow with underfunded healthcare systems.

Over the New Year holidays, Russia recorded around 5,000 fewer daily Covid-19 cases from a peak of nearly 30,000 on Christmas Eve. Health officials say the rate of infection has stabilized, though experts attribute the drop to fewer tests and expect a rebound in the coming weeks.

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