

Vaccinated Russians in Far East Promised Mask Exemption

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Health officials urge vaccine recipients to continue wearing face masks until the shot builds up its effectiveness. **Sergei Vedyaskin / Moskva News Agency**

Russians vaccinated against the coronavirus in the Sakhalin region of the Far East will be exempted from wearing face masks, its governor [announced](#) Thursday in contradiction to expert recommendations.

Health officials urge vaccine recipients to continue wearing masks, maintaining social distance and steering clear of crowds until the shot builds up their immunity.

Related article: [Russia Says It Has Vaccinated 1.5M. Some Experts Think the Numbers Don't Add Up.](#)

“Everyone who gets vaccinated will receive special badges. They will give [them] the right not to wear masks in public places,” Sakhalin governor Valery Limarenko said on social media.

It was not immediately clear if the badges will be part of the Russian government's electronic vaccination [certificate](#) system for overseas travel that President Vladimir Putin ordered early this month.

Limarenko said the Sakhalin region, with a population of fewer than 500,000, is due to begin distributing 9,000 Sputnik V vaccine doses starting this Saturday. He promised the region 6,300 kilometers east of Moscow would receive a monthly batch of 10,000 doses from now on.

Putin on Wednesday ordered a mass vaccination campaign to start next week amid reports of slower-than-expected rollout that began early in December.

Russia, which has the world's fourth-highest number of Covid-19 infections at nearly 3.5 million cases, says it has vaccinated 1.5 million people so far. Experts [counter](#) that the true number of vaccinated Russians may be up to five times lower than stated.

Russia reported an uptick in new Covid-19 cases Thursday after a significant drop over the Christmas and New Year holidays that experts linked to a slowdown in testing.

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