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Russia Launches Mass Coronavirus Vaccination Campaign

By AFP

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The jab is now available for anyone who wants it. **Sergei Vedyashkin / Moskva News Agency**

Russia launched a mass coronavirus vaccination campaign on Monday in a bid to end its outbreak without reimposing a new nationwide lockdown.

Residents of the far eastern city of Vladivostok queued to receive the country's homemade Sputnik V jab early Monday after President Vladimir Putin last week tasked officials with making it available to the country's entire population of 146 million.

"It's the only available way we have of preventing the illness today," Valery Grishin told AFP at a city clinic as he waited for his jab.

He said it was every duty of every Russian to get the vaccine so as "not to infect others."

Unlike many European countries, Russia has avoided reintroducing a strict nationwide lockdown despite being hit by a second wave of infections.

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Coronavirus cases in the country on Monday stood at more than 3.5 million, the fourth-highest national total in the world.

But aiming to uphold a struggling economy, Russia has pinned its hopes on ending the pandemic by rushing to inoculate its population rather than introducing a new shutdown.

In August, the country registered Sputnik V — named after the Soviet-era satellite — months ahead of Western competitors and before the start of large-scale clinical trials.

Officials have since said the jab is more than 90 percent effective and in early December began administering it to workers who come into contact with a large number of people, including medical staff and teachers.

Moscow's Deputy Mayor Anastasia Rakova said 190,000 people had been vaccinated so far in the city of 12 million.

The shot is now available to anyone who wants it. The vaccination centers are located at prominent sites in the city.

An AFP journalist saw a queue of around 50 people on Monday waiting to get the jab at the GUM luxury department store in Moscow where Christmas decorations were still on display.

Valery Krivetsky, a 35-year-old chemist, said he had wanted to get the vaccine "for a long time."

"They announced you could get vaccinated without signing up, so I came right away," he said.

Russia will nonetheless have to overcome vaccine skepticism. According to a recent poll, only 38% of Russians plan on getting a shot.

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