

Lifting Mask Mandates in Chechnya, Udmurtia 'Premature,' Health Expert Warns

February 11, 2021



While Russia launched mass vaccination last month, new infections remain high as vaccination rates struggle to gain steam. **Yelena Afonina / TASS**

Two Russian regions' move to lift their face mask mandates is premature, a leading health expert told The Moscow Times on Thursday.

Officials in the republic of [Chechnya](#) and the republic of [Udmurtia](#) on Wednesday announced that residents would no longer be required to wear face masks in public, becoming the first two regions of Russia to do so. Russia's consumer health watchdog issued a nationwide mask mandate in October amid surging new infections.

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"I have serious concerns about prematurely lifting these restrictions since we are still in the

middle of a pandemic,” said Vasiliy Vlasov, a professor of the Higher School of Economics and vice president of the Russian Society for Evidence-Based Medicine.

The two regions said that residents are still advised to wear protective equipment in public places, especially people at high risk of severe coronavirus cases and people who have not developed immunity to the virus.

Vlasov said he hoped that regional leaders “would make decisions based on scientific evidence.”

According to Russia’s national Covid-19 information center, Chechnya [has](#) one of the lowest Covid-19 growth rates per day, at about 0.2%, compared to other regions in Russia.

Unlike countries in Europe, Russia has avoided a return to wide-reaching lockdown measures seen at the beginning of the pandemic, citing a need to keep its economy open and relying on its domestically developed coronavirus vaccine.

While Russia launched mass vaccination last month, new infections remain high as vaccination rates [struggle](#) to gain steam. Russia [surpassed](#) 4 million infections this week, making it the fourth hardest-hit country in the world after the U.S., India and Brazil.

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