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Russia Confirms First Cases of Indian Virus Strain

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Sophia Sandurskaya / Moskva News Agency

Russia has confirmed the first cases of the Indian coronavirus mutation within its borders among a group of Indian students, the Kommersant business daily reported Thursday, citing the regional consumer protection watchdog.

The national headquarters of Rospotrebnadzor later denied the presence of the Indian strain among the students.

The news comes amid heightened fears worldwide of more-contagious coronavirus variants from India, which has been battling the world's largest surge of new infections and deaths in recent weeks. The World Health Organization on Tuesday listed the B.1.617 variant first detected in India last year as a "variant of concern," saying preliminary studies suggest it spreads more easily than other strains.

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Those infected were part of a group of 130 first-year medical students from India who arrived in Ulyanovsk between April 17-30, the Ulyanovsk region department of Rospotrebnadzor told Kommersant. The students are enrolled at Ulyanovsk State University some 705 kilometers east of Moscow.

While all 130 students presented negative coronavirus tests at the Russian border, 60 tested positive for Covid-19 after their arrival — 16 of whom were found to have had the B.1.617 variant that originated in India, university dean Boris Kostishko told Kommersant.

All students who tested positive for coronavirus were then moved from quarantine to medical observation at a specialized Covid-19 hospital.

The Ulyanovsk department of Rospotrebnadzor told Kommersant that it has taken all the necessary precautions to ensure the strain doesn't spread outside the hospital or the quarantine facilities.

The confirmation of the first Indian strain cases comes a day after Russian Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said Russia had not recorded any cases of the variant.

Twenty Indian students at the Bashkir State Medical University in Ufa, the capital of the nearby republic of Bashkortostan, were also diagnosed with coronavirus last week. It has not been confirmed whether any of them have the Indian variant.

"Of 20 people, 11 have been discharged and nine have been hospitalized with a mild or moderate case of the disease," the Bashkortostan department of Rospotrebnadzor's head Anna Kazak told Interfax last Friday.

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