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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Moscow Sees Major Spike in Virus Cases After Extended Holiday

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President Putin had ordered an 11-day non-working period over the early May holidays in a bid to slow the virus' spread. **Denis Grishkin / Moskva News Agency**

Moscow has reported 3,818 new coronavirus cases Friday, the highest daily count since January, as Russia returned from an extended non-working period designed to prevent a third wave of the pandemic.

Nationwide, Russia confirmed 9,462 new cases and 939 deaths across all but one region Friday. The country has one of the world's highest Covid-19 caseloads at nearly 5 million as well as one of its highest officially confirmed death tolls at more than 100,000.

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Russia's top infectious disease specialist Vladislav Zhemchugov linked Moscow's spike to ramped up testing and Russians returning from abroad.

“There would have been even more [new cases] if this separation [of people] had not happened during the holidays,” Zhemchugov said in comments to the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

Moscow chief infectious disease specialist Nikolai Malyshev also attributed the spike, the highest since Jan. 17 and a 37% increase from Thursday, to the non-working period.

“One way or another, people met, gathered at the same table and traveled in public transport,” Malyshev told RIA Novosti.

President Vladimir Putin, who ordered the May 1-11 non-working period in a bid to ward off a third wave, called the decision “justified” as Russia reported fewer Covid-19 cases than during the second wave.

Friday’s surge also comes on the week that the Russian capital reported more new infections than discharged hospital patients.

The increase in cases has led the organizers of the Moscow Half Marathon, the country’s largest half marathon, to cancel the race.

Most restrictions have been lifted across Russia and life in Moscow, the epicenter of the national outbreak, has all but returned to normal since the start of the year.

Last month, the Kremlin denied a Bloomberg report that Russia has been keeping secret statistics that showed the country being in the midst of a third Covid-19 wave.

Authorities have vowed to vaccinate 70% of the Russian population to reach herd immunity by this fall. The current pace of vaccinations, however, suggests that their target will only be attainable by the fall of 2022.

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