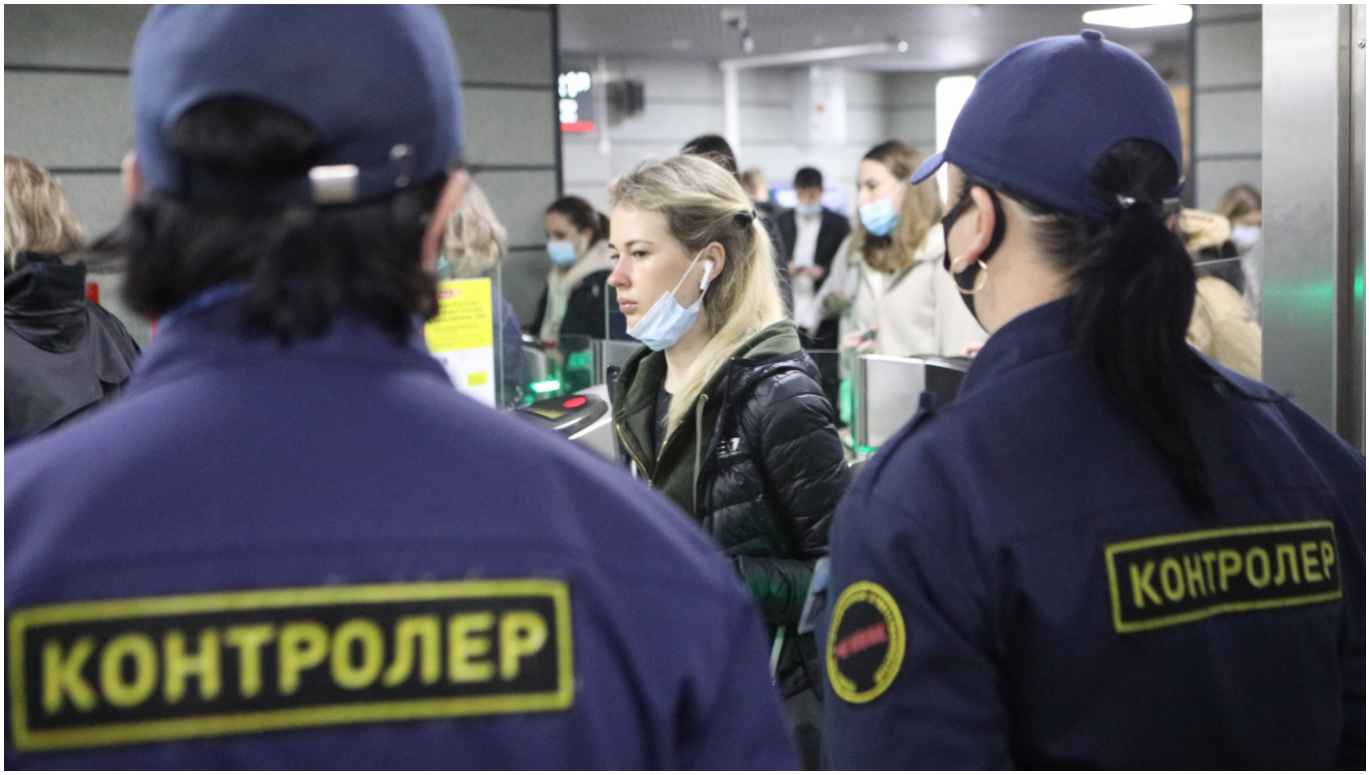
The Moscow Times
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Moscow to Reopen Hospitals, Step Up Mask and Glove Enforcement as Virus Spikes

June 09, 2021



Moscow's virus spike is part of a nationwide surge in infections, which for the first time in three months topped 10,000 cases. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

Moscow authorities announced Wednesday plans to reopen field hospitals and step up mask and glove enforcement as the epicenter of Russia's outbreak reported its highest number of new cases since the start of 2021.

Russia's Covid-19 response center confirmed 4,124 new Moscow infections Wednesday, the first time since Jan. 16 when the capital was nearing the end of the pandemic's second wave. Health experts attribute the latest spike to mass gatherings and people flouting health guidelines against the backdrop of a slow nationwide vaccine uptake.

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“The epidemiological situation in Moscow is getting worse. The number of cases is growing,” said Yevgeny Danchikov, who heads the main oversight directorate at the Moscow Mayor’s Office.

Authorities will begin strict enforcement of the mask-and-glove mandate on the metro and other public transportation and at shopping and entertainment centers, as well as at other places of mass gathering, Danchikov said.

Violators will be fined between 4,000 and 5,000 rubles ($55-70), the Moskva news agency quoted the official as saying.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin meanwhile asked restaurants and bars to observe health measures and announced plans to open "several more" Covid-19 hospitals in the near future.

"The situation remains difficult. We're seeing a surge in infections day after day," Sobyanin said in televised remarks, saying around 10,000 hospital beds were occupied in the Russian capital.

Sobyanin also urged Muscovites to vaccinate and said authorities do not plan to reintroduce lockdown measures that have been lifted since the start of 2021 despite the latest surge.

Moscow’s virus spike is part of a nationwide surge in infections, which for the first time in three months topped 10,000 cases Wednesday.

Russia is among the world’s most-affected countries by the pandemic with 5.15 million cases and nearly 125,000 officially confirmed deaths, while excess deaths are at least three times that amount.

Includes reporting from AFP.

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https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/06/09/moscow-to-step-up-mask-and-glove-enforcement-as-virus-spikes-a74167