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Euro 2020 Host St. Petersburg Tightens Virus Restrictions

By AFP

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Peter Kovalev/TASS

Authorities in St. Petersburg, which is hosting a series of Euro 2020 matches, said Monday they were tightening anti-coronavirus restrictions in an effort to curb a new spike in infections.

Russia's second city is the country's worst hotspot after Moscow and is expected to host thousands of football fans from Europe.

The new restrictions will be introduced from Thursday, after Russia play Finland in the city on Wednesday.

Officials in St. Petersburg have earlier said that all necessary measures will be taken to protect fans and players during Europe's biggest football extravaganza.

The city's showcase stadium, Gazprom Arena, will be filled to 50% capacity.

From Thursday, food courts and children's play areas in shopping malls in Russia's second city will be closed, and no food will be sold at Euro 2020 fan zones, authorities said in a statement early Monday.

Cinemas will be operating at 50% capacity, down from 75% now, and restaurants must close between 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.

"Guests at all public events including those held in the open air are obliged to use masks," city authorities said.

Many Russians are refusing to wear masks on public transport and in other public places.

Coronavirus infections are once again on the rise in Russia as a vaccination campaign is stalling. At the weekend authorities in Moscow announced a "non-working" week in the Russian capital, with non-essential workers told to stay home.

On Monday, Russian authorities reported 13,721 new cases including 6,590 in Moscow and 865 in St. Petersburg.

St. Petersburg has been selected to host seven matches — including a quarter-final — in June and July after the tournament was postponed for a year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The European Championship began on Friday and will end on July 11.

Overall, Russian health officials have registered more than five million coronavirus cases and more than 126,000 deaths but some experts say officials vastly under report fatalities.

Russia registered Sputnik V, the world's first coronavirus vaccine, in August 2020, but authorities have struggled to ramp up vaccination efforts.

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