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Moscow Bans Mass Gatherings, Closes Euro Fan Zone as Virus Sweeps City

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Infections in Moscow are expected to surpass 9,000 on Friday. **Valery Sharifulin / TASS**

Moscow has introduced new coronavirus restrictions in an attempt to stop a surge in infections that officials say is driven by new variants and sluggish vaccination rates, according to a decree signed by Mayor Sergei Sobyanin Friday.

The announcement comes as infections in Moscow, the epicenter of the pandemic within Russia, are expected to surpass 9,000 on Friday after surging from 3,000 to 7,000 in recent days.

Related article: Moscow Says New Variants Driving Covid-19 Cases to Record Level

Moscow has banned gatherings of over 1,000 people and will close dance floors, its Euro 2020 fan zone outside Luzhniki Stadium and other venues for mass events, Sobyanin said on his website.

"I didn't want to do this, but we have to," Sobyanin wrote.

The decree also extends existing restrictions on outdoor theaters, playgrounds, children's playrooms in malls and zoos until June 29. Likewise, food courts in shopping malls will still only be allowed to offer delivery and take-out while restaurants and bars must close between 11:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m.

The previously announced "non-working" week will still end on its original expiration date of June 21.

Starting June 19, Moscow will begin testing so-called "Covid-free" restaurants and cafes with 100% vaccinated staff that are only open to people who have been vaccinated and those with antibodies, Sobyanin added.

Migrant workers will be able to receive the one-dose Sputnik Light vaccine at no cost as soon as next month, he said.

In the future, Muscovites who wish to attend bars and restaurants at night will likely have to scan QR codes on their phones to confirm their vaccination status and allow authorities to track the spread of the disease, he added.

The Russian capital earlier this week announced that 60% of service sector workers will be required to get vaccinated in an effort to drive up flagging vaccination rates and combat a "dramatic" rise in cases.

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