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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Moscow Records Pandemic High for Covid Cases Second Day Running

By AFP

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The city plans to expand hospital beds to 24,000 from 17,000 over the next two weeks. **Denis Grishkin / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's capital Moscow on Saturday registered 9,120 new coronavirus infections in 24 hours, a second consecutive high, according to government figures.

Saturday's record topped the previous day's total of 9,056 new infections, according to the government's coronavirus tally, ballooning from 3,000 daily just two weeks ago.

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The new cases are being driven by the highly infectious Delta variant first identified in India and have threatened to overwhelm Moscow's hospitals, as officials rush to roll out new beds for Covid patients.

To deal with the onslaught of new patients, Deputy Moscow Mayor Anastasia Rakova said in a statement that the city would expand hospital beds to 24,000 from 17,000 over the next two weeks.

Moscow, the epicenter of Russia's outbreak, accounted Saturday for more than half of the country's new cases, which stood at nearly 5.3 million since the start of the pandemic.

The total caseload is the sixth-highest worldwide, according to an AFP tally.

On Friday, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said that the Delta variant accounted for nearly 90% of new cases.

The highly infectious variant has forced the mayor to reintroduce a host of pandemic restrictions in the Russian capital, which for months had all but returned to life as normal.

Russian authorities had banked on their four vaccines — Sputnik V, EpiVacCorona, CoviVac and the one-dose Sputnik Light — to curtail the pandemic, but has faced a populace skeptical of inoculation.

Although Russia rolled out its jab drive in December, just 19 million out of a population of some 146 million have received at least one dose of a vaccine, according to the Gogov website which tallies Covid figures from the regions and the media in the absence of a national statistics office.

One recent independent survey said 60% of Russians do not intend to be vaccinated.

But on Wednesday, Sobyanin ordered mandatory vaccination for residents of the Russian capital working in the service industry, saying some 60% would have to be fully inoculated by Aug. 15.

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