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Russian Employees Rejecting Vaccines Risk Unpaid Leave

By AFP

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Moscow has ordered mandatory vaccination for residents working in the service industry. **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS**

Russian workers who refuse Covid-19 vaccinations in areas where they are compulsory could be forced to take unpaid leave, the labor minister has warned as infections spike and inoculation drives slow.

Anton Kotyakov's comments come as Moscow and other cities introduce an array of curbs, including for the Euro 2020 football tournament.

"If the health authorities in a region make vaccination mandatory for some categories of workers, an unvaccinated employee could be suspended," Kotyakov said in comments posted Sunday to a state-run channel on the Telegram messaging app.

He added that the suspension would last as long as the decree for mandatory vaccination is in

effect.

Related article: Moscow Hospitals to Limit Treatment to Vaccinated Patients

Russian capital Moscow has ordered mandatory vaccination for residents working in the service industry, saying some 60% would have to be fully inoculated by Aug. 15.

Seven other cities and areas, including the second city of St. Petersburg, have imposed similar rules, according to Russian media.

The new wave of infections came as St. Petersburg, the country's worst Covid hotspot after Moscow, is slated to host seven Euro 2020 matches — including a quarter-final on July 2 — expected to draw thousands of European football fans.

Although free jabs have been available to Russians since December, just 19.5 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 Moscow, only 1.5 million of the city's roughly 12 million people have been fully vaccinated.

A recent independent survey found that 60% of Russians do not intend to get the shot.

After two straight days of record infections, Moscow registered a slight decrease Sunday with 8,305 infections in 24 hours. This is still far higher than two weeks ago when about 3,000 cases were recorded daily.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin has said the highly infectious Delta variant first identified in India represented nearly 90% of new cases.

The number of new cases surpassed 1,000 for the first time in 24 hours in St. Petersburg since the end of February, out of 17,611 nationwide.

Russia, with 129,361 deaths recorded by the government, is the hardest hit country in Europe.

Under a broader definition for deaths linked to Covid, statistics agency Rosstat has counted at least 270,000 deaths since the pandemic began.

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