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Russia Warns of 'Explosive' Virus Surge

By AFP

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Russian authorities have stepped up measures to encourage a populace suspicious of coronavirus vaccines to get inoculated. **SOPA Images via ZUMA Wire / TASS**

Russia warned on Wednesday of an "explosive" spread of the Delta coronavirus variant in the country that was made worse by a sluggish vaccination campaign leading to rapidly rising infections and deaths.

Citing increases in cases of coronavirus in all Russian regions, Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova called for stronger restrictive measures and speeding up of inoculations.

"Last week the death rate linked to Covid increased by 21.3% compared to previous months," Golikova said, as the country records thousands of new cases and hundreds of deaths every day.

"The situation has become explosive," said Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, who has taken a leading role in Russia's response to the pandemic.

He said that more than 50,000 new infections had been recorded in the Russian capital, the epicenter of the country's outbreak, over the past two weeks, calling it a pandemic high.

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The highly infectious Delta variant, which first appeared in India, represents nearly 90% of new cases in Moscow, Sobyanin said.

He said that the city has 20,000 beds available for coronavirus patients, more than half of which are occupied.

Russian authorities have stepped up measures to encourage a populace suspicious of coronavirus vaccines to get inoculated.

Last week Sobyanin announced mandatory vaccinations for 60% of service sector workers by Aug. 15.

The city has also introduced an anti-Covid pass for dining out starting June 28, allowing only residents who have been vaccinated, were sick in the past six months or can present a recent negative PCR test into restaurants.

Although free jabs have been available to Russians since December, just 20.6 million out of a population of about 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.

Russia is among the countries hardest hit by the pandemic, with the sixth-highest number of cases in the world, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

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