The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Muscovites Flock to Vaccination Centers Amid Mandatory Jab Push

The capital's mayor decreed last week that most service workers must have two jabs by Aug. 15.

By Uliana Pavlova

June 24, 2021

People queuing at a vaccination center in the GUM department store on Red Square. **Sergei Ilnitsky / EPA / TASS**

Muscovites queued in Red Square's iconic GUM department store on the hottest June day on record Wednesday, waiting for vaccinations that will allow them to keep their jobs.

"I am not against vaccinations, I just didn't think I needed one since I already had Covid," Aleksey, a 31-year-old barman, told The Moscow Times while standing in a line to enter the vaccination center on the top floor of the building that snaked all the way around an ornate mezzanine.

"However, since I work in a restaurant, my employer gave us until Friday to get vaccinated

because on Monday QR code requirements go into effect and an antibody test takes about two weeks, so I decided to just do it," he said.

Related article: 'What We Did Before Just Isn't Working': Delta Variant Threatens to Overwhelm Russia

Last week, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin ordered compulsory vaccination for 60% of city's service sector workers and added restrictions on public dining and events that require people to scan QR codes confirming vaccination.

From June 28, all Moscow cafes and restaurants will only serve customers who have been vaccinated, had Covid-19 in the past six months or present a negative test taken within the past 78 hours.

According to the mayor's decree, service sector workers must have their first jabs by July 15 and their second doses by Aug. 15.

It defines service workers as anyone employed in retail, beauty salons, fitness clubs, drycleaning, food and catering services, post offices, banks, education, health, social services and cultural institutions.

Even though vaccination remains voluntary for Russians, service workers face losing their jobs if they decide not to have the jab.

"If a Muscovite works in the service sector, they must get vaccinated. If they made a decision not to get vaccinated, then they should simply stop working in the service sector," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists on Thursday.

A poll by the SuperJob employment search website published Thursday said 6 out of 10 Muscovites are against the Covid-free regimen in cafes and restaurants imposed by the city government.

Ilya, 24, is a waiter at the restaurant who decided to get vaccinated only after being asked by his employer.

"I am not scared of vaccines but I just haven't thought about it," he said.

"If I have to do it then I will do it," he added.

Soaring cases

The new measures come after soaring numbers of cases of the Delta variant of the coronavirus have filled the capital's hospitals. On Thursday, Moscow reported over 8,500 infections in Moscow, and 92 deaths, the highest in one day since the start of the pandemic, according to the state-run TASS news agency.

Mayor Sobyanin's ultimatum seems to be working, as his deputy Anastasia Rakova said in a statement on Tuesday that the vaccination rate had increased by 4-5 times since the

announcement.

Alena, 25, is a make-up artist in a beauty salon and a former vaccine skeptic, who said she wouldn't be queuing for her first jab if it wasn't for Sobyanin's decree.

When asked whether she thought the new requirements were fair she spoke of the Russian concept of *avos*, which can be loosely translated as "blind hope" and describes a philosophy of expecting the best whatever the circumstances.

"Without pressure no one would be vaccinated in our country, because there is no faith in this vaccine," she said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/06/24/muscovites-flock-to-vaccination-centers-amid-mandatory-jab-push-a74325