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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia's Excess Death Toll Passes 530K As Delta Variant Hits Hard

June saw a surge in nationwide fatalities as Moscow introduced mandatory vaccinations.

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Russia's healthcare system has been put under renewed pressure by a surge in coronavirus cases. **EPA / TASS**

Russia has recorded more than half a million excess deaths since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, official figures published Friday show.

Nationwide fatalities surged during June — the latest month for which such data is available — as the Delta variant of the coronavirus tore across the capital Moscow and spread out into the regions, sending mortality rates back to levels not seen since winter.

That marks a reversal from earlier trends, as deaths had fallen back close to pre-pandemic levels during May. But the rapid spread of the Delta variant, surge in hospitalizations and deaths during June triggered regional authorities across the country to reintroduce some

restrictions and roll out mandatory vaccination rules in a bid to kickstart Russia's sluggish jab drive.

More than 185,000 people died from all causes in June 2021 — 26% more than during the same month in 2019 — figures published by the Rosstat federal statistics service Friday showed. It was the sharpest increase in monthly deaths across the country since January.

The sharp rise took Russia's excess fatality toll since the start of the pandemic to above 531,000, according to The Moscow Times analysis. That is one of the highest figures in the world, both in absolute terms and adjusted for population.

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Excess fatalities — the difference between all registered deaths during a period of time compared with what should be expected given recent mortality trends — is seen by demographers and statisticians as the most reliable indicator of the number of likely Covid-19 fatalities, as it removes possible discrepancies and flaws in national accounting and attribution standards.

Russia's excess death tally is significantly higher than the number of deaths which have been officially attributed to Covid-19. Rosstat said 23,372 people died from Covid-19 during June, with a further 3,746 patients dying with Covid-19, but where the infection was not deemed the main cause.

Rosstat has recorded 220,000 official Covid-19 deaths since the start of the pandemic — accounting for 41% of Russia's excess fatalities during the same period. In a number of European countries, official coronavirus deaths account for 90% or more of increased deaths.

The imposition of mandatory vaccination rules across many parts of the country, including the capital Moscow, sparked an uptick in people coming forward to be inoculated. But despite vaccines having been widely available since the start of the year, only one in four Russians have had at least a first dose of one of the country's homemade vaccines.

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