

Russia's Excess Death Toll Hits 600K

A Delta variant sweeping across the country and low vaccination rates resulted in more than 2,000 extra fatalities a day during July.

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August 27, 2021



Russia has the second-highest number of excess fatalities in the world. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Russia recorded almost 64,000 excess fatalities in July as a brutal third wave of the coronavirus swept across the country, encountering an under-vaccinated population and [overwhelmed](#) hospitals in its path.

In a report [released](#) late Friday evening, the Rosstat state statistics service said 215,000 people died in July 2021 — more than in any single pre-pandemic month for at least the last 15 years.

The sharp jump in fatalities — 42% more than in July 2019 — takes Russia's total excess death toll since the beginning of the pandemic to 596,000, according to The Moscow Times' analysis.

Excess deaths — which compares the number of recorded fatalities from all causes with what would be expected in a normal period — is seen by demographers and statisticians as the gold-standard method for measuring the human toll of the pandemic as it strips out differences in national reporting standards and misattributions.

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Russia has the second-highest number of excess deaths in the [world](#), behind only the U.S., and the fifth-highest once adjusted for population.

Given Russia's declining mortality rates over the last decade, experts say the figure of 596,000 could slightly underestimate the number of virus fatalities in reality, because Russia's mortality rate could have been expected to continue falling.

Russia's excess death toll continues to differ from the number of official Covid-19 fatalities reported by various government bodies.

Russia was [criticized](#) last year for apparent underreporting of coronavirus fatalities, with excess fatalities coming in up to five times higher than official Covid-19 deaths in some months. In many European countries, official Covid-19 deaths fully account for the observed increase in overall excess fatalities.

In recent months official Covid-19 fatalities have been closer to the scale of the pandemic implied by excess deaths and July saw the [highest](#) number of official Covid-19 fatalities since the start of the pandemic.

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The statistics agency recorded 44,128 official Covid-19 fatalities during July 2021, and said that in another 6,293 cases the virus was present but not deemed to be the main cause of death.

Nevertheless, the surge in overall deaths was still more than twice that outlined by the nationwide coronavirus task force's daily tally of new cases and fatalities.

Russia was battered by a third wave of the coronavirus over the summer, [fuelled](#) by the highly transmissible Delta variant. Despite vaccines having been widely and freely available since the end of 2020, only 25% of Russians are fully vaccinated and multiple opinion polls have shown more than half remain opposed to inoculation.

Political leaders have attempted to encourage vaccination through a combination of incentives and mandates, including various regional compulsory vaccination drives — resulting in a [temporary](#) uplift in demand for jabs, which has since [subsided](#).

Russia has continued to see around 20,000 cases a day and [record numbers](#) of daily fatalities throughout August.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/08/27/russias-excess-death-toll-hits-600k-a74920>