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Putin Says '3 Dozen' in Kremlin Inner Circle Had Covid

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Putin on vacation. **kremlin.ru**

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that three dozen people in his inner circle have tested positive for the coronavirus because they failed to receive booster shots on time.

Fresh off his two-week self-isolation due to an outbreak within his entourage, Putin was filmed on state television telling Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan about high antibody levels.

According to the state-run RIA Novosti news agency, Putin also said that three dozen people in his inner circle — including an aide with whom he had worked all day — received their booster shots late and tested positive as a result.

The Kremlin has maintained that the 68-year-old leader was in good health throughout his quarantine.

Authorities have gone to great lengths to protect Putin — who said he has been vaccinated

with Russia's homegrown Sputnik V jab but didn't release footage of his vaccination — since the start of the pandemic. The Russian president is known for his aversion to germs and intense cautiousness regarding his health.

Foreign leaders, journalists, officials and Olympic athletes have all had to self-isolate before meeting the longtime Russian leader. Meanwhile, "disinfection tunnels" have been installed in the Kremlin and at Putin's residence outside Moscow to protect him from Covid-19.

Russia has struggled to keep the pandemic under control since the surge of the more-contagious Delta variant that swept the country during the summer, with slower-than-hoped vaccination rates allowing cases to spread and deaths to hit pandemic highs.

AFP contributed reporting.

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