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Russia's Coronavirus Excess Death Toll Hits 660K

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Russia has one of the highest excess deaths rates in the world. **Sofia Sandurskaya / Moskva News Agency**

Russia recorded 65,000 excess deaths in August, data published Friday by the Rosstat national statistics service showed, as another brutal wave of the coronavirus pandemic continues to show no sign of abating.

The figures revealed that August 2021 was one of the most deadly months since the beginning of the pandemic in Russia, with the country seeing a 45% increase in deaths from all causes compared to the same month in 2019.

Russia's total excess death toll since the beginning of the pandemic until the end of August, the most recent available data , stands at 660,000 — one of the highest rates in the world both in absolute terms and on a per capita basis.

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With one of the world's highest vaccine hesitancy levels, Russia's vaccination rates have remained stubbornly low at around 30% of the population despite its homemade Sputnik V vaccine having been widely available for free since last winter. Amid a fourth wave which has seen infection numbers approach record highs in recent days, several Russian regions have reintroduced restrictions such as vaccine passports for entry to crowded indoor areas and mandatory vaccinations for certain workers.

Excess deaths — a measure which compares fatalities from all causes to pre-pandemic figures — is seen by demographers as the most reliable measure of lives lost to Covid-19.

Rosstat said some 43,580 people in Russia died from Covid-19 in August, with the virus present but not deemed the main cause of death in another 5,809 cases.

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The country's national coronavirus task force, which publishes daily tallies of infections and deaths, had initially recorded fewer than 25,000 fatalities during the same period.

Russia has been accused of undercounting Covid-19 fatalities from the start of the pandemic, as it only considers deaths where the virus was the sole contributor toward its official toll.

Politicians and health officials stepped up warnings of a fourth wave of the coronavirus following last month's parliamentary elections as cases and hospitalizations have risen both in the capital Moscow and in Russia's regions.

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