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Russian Region Raffles Coal to Boost Covid Vaccinations

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Mohamed Boualem Essamy (CC BY-SA 4.0)

This Christmas, a lump of coal in your stockings means you're on the nice list.

That's what around 45,000 residents in Russia's Far East will be eligible to win if they get the coronavirus vaccine.

Regional authorities are raffling free haircuts, dental services, gym memberships and microwaves as they hope to stimulate a stubbornly slow vaccination drive amid Russia's record-breaking fourth wave of the pandemic.

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"The sort of jackpot is a certificate for three tons of coal, excluding delivery," said Anastasia Sakharova, a senior official in the Khabarovsk region's Imeni Lazo district, population 45,000, some 8,000 kilometers east of Moscow.

“We organized everything ourselves, so the prizes may not be that large, but they’re important,” Sakharova was quoted as saying by the todaykhv.ru news website Wednesday.

She valued the grand prize at 15,000 rubles ($200) and noted that the lottery has played its part in boosting vaccine uptake.

Sakharova said more than 100 people have gotten the jab in each of the past two days since the lottery was announced, up from 20 people per day in September.

The prizes, including the three metric tons of coal, will be handed out live online this Dec. 1 and will be available for self-pickup for one month.

The Khabarovsk region goes into partial lockdown Thursday, with shopping malls, gyms, playgrounds shuttered and restaurants offering only takeout to slow down Russia’s record-breaking daily infections and deaths.

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