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Russia to Introduce Vaccine Passports Amid Record Virus Surge

By AFP

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Only Russians with an digital health pass will be able to enter restaurants, shops, and to board intercity trains and flights. **Semyon Antonov/TASS**

The Russian government said Friday it had submitted to parliament two bills that will introduce mandatory health passes to access restaurants and public transport, amid a new wave of coronavirus cases.

With more than 8.9 million cases registered since the start of the pandemic, Russia is one of the worst-hit countries in the world and a devastating wave this autumn has seen infections and deaths reach new records.

The new legislation is aimed at boosting Russia's sluggish immunization rates amid strong anti-vaccination sentiment.

Russia has rolled out several homegrown vaccines, including Sputnik V, but only about a third

of the population is fully inoculated.

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From Feb. 1 those wishing to visit public places like bars and restaurants will have to prove they have been inoculated, have recovered from the virus or have medical conditions that prevent them from getting vaccinated.

"The proposed solutions are an emergency measure due to the difficult situation with the coronavirus," the government said in a statement.

The measure will be in place until June 1, 2022.

Health passes will not be required to visit pharmacies and essential shops.

From Feb. 1 Russians wishing to travel by airplanes and trains will also have to present QR-codes, according to a second bill submitted to parliament. Foreign travellers will also have to present health passes.

A number of Russian regions have already introduced a requirement for proof of vaccination to visit restaurants, cafes and shopping centres.

Moscow, the epicenter of the pandemic in Russia, still does not require proof of vaccination for most public activities.

The Russian government said that individual regions will have the authority to determine a list of places that will require the presentation of health passes.

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Less than 35% of Russia's population have been fully vaccinated, according to the Gogov website, which tallies Covid-19 data from the regions.

On Friday, authorities reported 40,123 new cases and 1,235 fatalities over the previous 24 hours.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said that with the country seeing more than 1,000 deaths per day hospitals were under huge pressure.

She said that most of those who ended up in intensive care or died from the coronavirus had not been vaccinated.

"I think that nearly every family has such losses and unfortunately these losses are linked to our behavior," she said. "To our reluctance to do what we must do: simply go and get vaccinated."

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