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Russia Plans No New Virus Rules Despite Case Records

By AFP

February 02, 2022



Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency

Russia has no plans to introduce large-scale restrictions to reel in surging coronavirus cases, a senior health official said on Wednesday, despite reporting new infection records for 13 days running.

Moscow has been hesitant throughout the pandemic to introduce any restrictions that could hurt the embattled economy.

"The healthcare system is coping," Anna Popova, the head of Russia's federal health regulator, told state-run news agency RIA Novosti in an interview published on Wednesday.

"The mortality rate is not higher now compared to previous periods that we went through in the last two years, and there are no grounds today for any special restrictions," Popova added.

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Officials in Moscow instituted a strict but brief lockdown at the start of the pandemic in March 2020 but have since largely allowed regions to implement their own measures to avoid case surges.

"Regions are carefully introducing kinds of special measures without plunging all of society and the entire economy into a state of collapse, which, today, does not need to be done," Popova told RIA Novosti.

Officials reported a record 141,883 new cases over the last 24 hours on Wednesday — a dramatic increase from two weeks ago when 33,899 new cases were reported on Jan. 19.

Russia's second city of St. Petersburg was particularly badly hit, recording 13,000 infections.

A health official in the former imperial capital described the wave of cases as "extremely difficult" and said authorities would be adding hospital bed capacity.

Natalya Yakovleva, a 49-year-old living in the southern part of St. Petersburg, told AFP that there were "crowds" at her clinic.

"You have to wait for an unknown amount of time, everyone is coughing on each other," she said.

Russia has been hit harder than any other European country in terms of virus deaths and ranks fourth in the world in Covid fatalities after the United States, Brazil and India.

A government website that tracks the pandemic says 332,690 people have died.

But federal statistics agency Rosstat, which has a border definition of virus-related fatalities, puts the figure at more than 680,000, according to an official tally.

Russia has made several homemade vaccines available to the public for free, but only around half of its vaccine-skeptic population is fully vaccinated.

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