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Covid-19 Cases Surge in Russia as New Variants Drive Infections

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A medical professional administers a Covid-19 test. **Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency**

Covid-19 cases are rising across Russia, driven by two new variants that are more resistant to immunity, the country's consumer safety watchdog Rospotrebnadzor said Friday.

Over the past two to three weeks, infections from the KP.3 and LB.1 variants have surged by 100% and 400%, respectively. Rospotrebnadzor identified them as "FLiRT variants," a term used to describe several variants that have independently picked up the same set of mutations.

"These variants have specific mutations in the spike protein that allow the virus to evade the immune response while still effectively infecting cells," the agency said.

It attributed the sharp rise in Covid-19 cases in early September 2024 to the growing prevalence of these variants in Russia, compounded by seasonal factors.

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In May, Rospotrebnadzor had initially downplayed the severity of the FLiRT variants, stating that they were "no more dangerous than other variants" when they first emerged in the country.

However, health authorities reported a noticeable increase in Covid-19 hospitalizations last month, with a 50% rise recorded in the final week of August, when nearly 3,000 people were hospitalized nationwide.

The first week of September saw hospitalizations climb to almost 3,200.

Rospotrebnadzor recommended practicing good personal hygiene, regularly ventilating indoor spaces, maintaining optimal humidity, avoiding close contact with people showing symptoms and seeking medical attention at the first sign of illness.

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