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Russia Probes Death of 9 Newborns at Siberian Hospital

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Maternity hospital No. 1 in Novokuznetsk. **Yuri Novokuznetsk / google/maps**

Russian investigators have launched a criminal probe into the deaths of nine newborns at a maternity hospital in the Siberian city of Novokuznetsk, officials said Tuesday.

Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, announced a criminal case over the potential negligence, saying forensic specialists were at the ward working to determine the cause of the newborns' deaths.

The Kemerovo regional branch of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office said it had placed the investigation directly under its control.

It also noted earlier that representatives from the state health and consumer rights watchdogs had conducted checks into the hospital's compliance with healthcare legislation, the protection of minors' rights and sanitary requirements.

The Kemerovo region's Healthcare Ministry later said the infants died as a result of medical

complications. According to its statement, cited by state news agencies, 32 of the 234 infants delivered between December 1 and January 11 received treatment in the hospital's resuscitation and intensive care unit. 17 of the 32 infants were in critical condition with severe intrauterine infections.

"Unfortunately, nine children did not survive. Four children remain under observation in the intensive care unit," the ministry was quoted as saying, adding that four other infants were transferred to a children's hospital for treatment.

Kemerovo Governor Ilya Seredyuk said the head of the hospital had been suspended for the duration of the investigation.

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Earlier, local media, citing an anonymous healthcare source, reported Monday that the high mortality rate could be linked to an acute staffing shortage at the hospital, where nursing assistants were allegedly performing the duties of specialized nurses.

Maternity Hospital No. 1, one of only two in the city of 500,000 people in the major coal-mining region, announced it had suspended admissions due to a "flu quarantine."

On Tuesday evening, Governor Seredyuk announced that Healthcare Minister Andrei Tarasov will inspect all of Kemerovo's maternity hospitals and perinatal centers "to ensure their readiness for the most complex cases." He added that federal specialists are expected to arrive from Moscow on Wednesday to evaluate obstetric care services in the region.

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