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Court Orders 3-Month Closure of Kemerovo Region Hospital Where Newborns Died

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Maternity hospital No. 1 in Novokuznetsk. **Yaroslav Belyayev / TASS**

A court in Siberia's Kemerovo region on Monday ordered a three-month suspension of services at a maternity hospital in the city of Novokuznetsk following the deaths of nine newborns there earlier this month.

Law enforcement officials arrested chief physician Vitaly Kheraskov and acting head of intensive care Alexei Emily at Novokuznetsk Maternity Hospital No. 1 last week. Prosecutors charged the two men with negligence resulting in death.

Forensic specialists are investigating the deaths of nine newborns at the hospital between Jan. 4 and Jan. 12. Health officials had said the infants all suffered from a range of illnesses transmitted during childbirth or pregnancy.

Novokuznetsk Maternity Hospital No. 1, one of only two maternity hospitals in the city of

around half a million people, announced last Tuesday that it had stopped accepting patients indefinitely due to a high rate of respiratory infection.

The Kemerovo regional court's press service said Monday that it had ordered the hospital to shut down for three months as law enforcement authorities carry out their investigation.

"Novokuznetsk Maternity Hospital No. 1 failed to comply with health and safety regulations in providing medical services," the press service said in a statement.

A lawyer representing the hospital did not dispute the allegations and pleaded guilty on behalf of the facility.

The deaths in Novokuznetsk, around 3,000 kilometers (1,864 miles) east of Moscow, have sparked public outrage and drawn condemnation from a wide range of Russian officials. According to some media reports, the hospital was significantly understaffed when the nine newborns died.

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