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Head of Mental Health Facility in Kemerovo Region Placed on Leave After 9 Patients Die

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TASS

Authorities in Siberia's Kemerovo region have launched sweeping inspections at more than a dozen mental health hospitals following the deaths of nine patients at one facility last week, the Interfax news agency reported Friday.

Besides the nine deaths, 62 patients at the facility in the coal mining city of Prokopyevsk were hospitalized after the outbreak of a viral infection. The head of the mental health hospital was placed on temporary leave, Kemerovo region Governor Ilya Seredyuk said at a meeting with officials.

Kemerovo's deputy chief of social development, Yelena Voronina, said all 13 mental health hospitals in the region, with nearly 4,000 beds total, would be subjected to snap inspections.

The Investigative Committee, Russia's top investigative body, announced Saturday that it had

launched a preliminary probe into possible negligence and health violations at the Prokopyevsk facility.

On Thursday, investigators alleged that staff at the mental health hospital had "created conditions that led to the viral outbreak." It said three deaths have been directly linked to infections, while the cause of death of the remaining six was still being determined.

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Regional health officials said Friday that 28 patients at the mental health hospital in Prokopyevsk were found to be infected with Haemophilus influenzae and Streptococcus, commonly known as Strep. Haemophilus influenzae can cause many different types of infections, from mild ear infections to more serious bloodstream infections.

Four of the hospitalized patients remained in critical condition as of Friday, officials said. Eleven others were said to have been discharged, leaving 51 patients at hospitals in Prokopyevsk and the neighboring city of Kovokuznetsk.

Governor Seredyuk said the head of the mental health hospital in Prokopyevsk is a person of interest in the police investigation and accused him of trying to obstruct the work of law enforcement.

The Kemerovo region is now facing two health-related scandals.

Earlier this month, a judge ordered the closure of a regional maternity hospital following the death of nine newborns there in short succession. Police arrested the hospital's chief physician and acting head of intensive care after they launched a criminal investigation into the incident.

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