

At least 17 deadly swine flu cases reported in Russia (Update)

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At least 17 people have died of swine flu in Russia since last month, according to AFP calculations based on statements from regional health authorities, as the virus appears to gain ground in the country.

"Five people have died from the H1N1 virus in Saint Petersburg," the spokeswoman for local health authorities, Maria Khitarishvili, told AFP on Tuesday. "Identification procedures for three other flu-related deaths have yet to be completed."

Local authorities in Russia's second-largest city said that 313 people had been hospitalised with the virus in the last 10 days.

Four swine flu-related deaths were also recorded in the southern region of Rostov among the 120 reported cases of the virus in the area, authorities said Tuesday.

These latest cases follow the deaths of four adults and one child from the virus in the nearby region of Dagestan, and the deaths of two infected patients in Yekaterinburg and the southern region of Adygea.

State media reported another deadly case of the virus in the northern city of Novy Urengoy in mid-December.

Top state doctor Anna Popova told Russian news agencies that the number of people infected with swine flu would "inevitably" grow next month.

Three people have died of swine flu in Armenia since the start of the year, authorities of the Caucasian country said last week.

Authorities in neighbouring Georgia said earlier this week that a first deadly case of the virus had been reported in the country's west.

In nearby Iran, swine flu has left 112 dead and forced the hospitalisation of more than 1,000 since mid-November, authorities said late last month.

A major H1N1 outbreak sparked a World Health Organization pandemic alert in June 2009, after the virus emerged from Mexico and the United States.

The outbreak killed around 18,500 people in 214 countries. The alert was lifted in August 2010.

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