

Russia sends virus experts, medics to Italy

March 22 2020

Russia on Sunday sent the first of nine military planes which are to take a total of 100 army virus experts and medics to Italy to help fight the coronavirus pandemic there.

The Russian defence ministry said the aid mission was agreed by President Vladimir Putin and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

They spoke on the phone Saturday evening, the Kremlin said.

The military transport planes arrived overnight at an aerodrome outside Moscow and eight medical teams were ready to fly out with mobile aerosol disinfecting units and medical equipment, the defence ministry said.

The first plane took off Sunday and was due to land at the Pratica di Mare military airport outside Rome, the ministry said.

The planes are set to fly out a group of around 100 people including specialists on viruses and epidemics from the defence ministry who have "significant international experience of fighting epidemics," it said.

The ministry said that the experts had previously taken part in fighting Ebola, African swine fever and anthrax outbreaks.

Russia has a total of 306 confirmed cases of [coronavirus](#) so far. Italy's death toll reached 4,825 on Saturday.

Putin visited Italy in July last year and has often spoken of his long friendship with former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi.

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