

Russia halts use of ventilators tied to deadly hospital fires

May 13 2020

Russia's healthcare regulator on Wednesday ordered a halt to the use of ventilators believed to have caused two fires at coronavirus hospitals that left six people dead.

The federal regulator Roszdravnadzor "has halted the use on Russian territory of... Aventa-M ventilators produced from April 1, 2020" by a company in the Urals, which is a subsidiary of the state conglomerate Rostec.

The devices were used to treat patients in hospitals in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, where the fires broke out, a statement said.

The fire in Moscow's Spasokukotsky hospital killed one person last week, while a blaze in a medical facility in Saint Petersburg Tuesday left five dead.

Russia's deputy prime minister overseeing healthcare, Tatiana Golikova, said Tuesday that investigators were looking into the circumstances of the fires.

Rostec said last month its factories would produce 6,711 ventilators to treat virus patients, though it was not clear how many of these were the Aventa-M model.

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said Wednesday that about 1,500 virus patients are currently on ventilators.

In Saint Petersburg, governor Alexander Beglov said the hospitals were suffering a shortage of ventilators.

The Aventa-M machines were also part of a Russian aid shipment to the United States on April 1.

However a spokesman for the US Federal Emergency Management Agency, which received the supplies, said the equipment was never used.

The ventilators were delivered to US states New York and New Jersey but "the flattening curve meant these ventilators were not needed," a spokesman told AFP.

"Out of an abundance of caution, the states are returning the ventilators to FEMA" and any future use will be decided after the Russian probe concludes, the spokesman added.

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Citation: Russia halts use of ventilators tied to deadly hospital fires (2020, May 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-russia-halts-ventilators-tied-deadly.html>

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