

Russia reports record jump in new virus cases

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Russia on Monday reported a new record increase in coronavirus infections, as some experts said the pandemic had hit the country harder than government statistics suggest.

Health officials reported 493 new virus deaths and 29,350 cases, bringing total infections to 2,877,727—the fourth-highest in the world.

Total fatalities stood at 51, 351.

Moscow and the second city of Saint Petersburg were the hardest hit, recording 7,797 and 3,752 new cases.

Russia has reported a much lower death rate compared to other badly hit countries, raising concerns that authorities have downplayed the figures.

Alexei Raksha, a former demographer at Russia's state statistics agency, said he believed around 250,000 had people died from the [coronavirus](#).

Raksha, who left the Rosstat statistics agency in July, told AFP that the Russian health ministry and the consumer health agency "downplay and falsify" coronavirus figures.

Russia's [second wave](#) has surged in recent weeks, but officials have not reimposed a strict nationwide lockdown launched in the early days of the pandemic and many Russians flout social distancing and mask-wearing rules.

The pandemic has overwhelmed Russia's already underfunded hospitals, while many medicines used to treat the coronavirus have disappeared from pharmacies.

Authorities in Saint Petersburg said that less than 4 percent of hospital beds remained available in the city of some 5 million people.

The northwestern city reported 77 new fatalities over the past 24 hours, the highest in the country.

A local doctor, speaking on condition of anonymity, said "a great number" of coronavirus patients were being hospitalised and were discharged before fully recovering to free up space.

Russia is pinning its hopes on home-made vaccines, including the Sputnik V named after the first satellite in space.

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