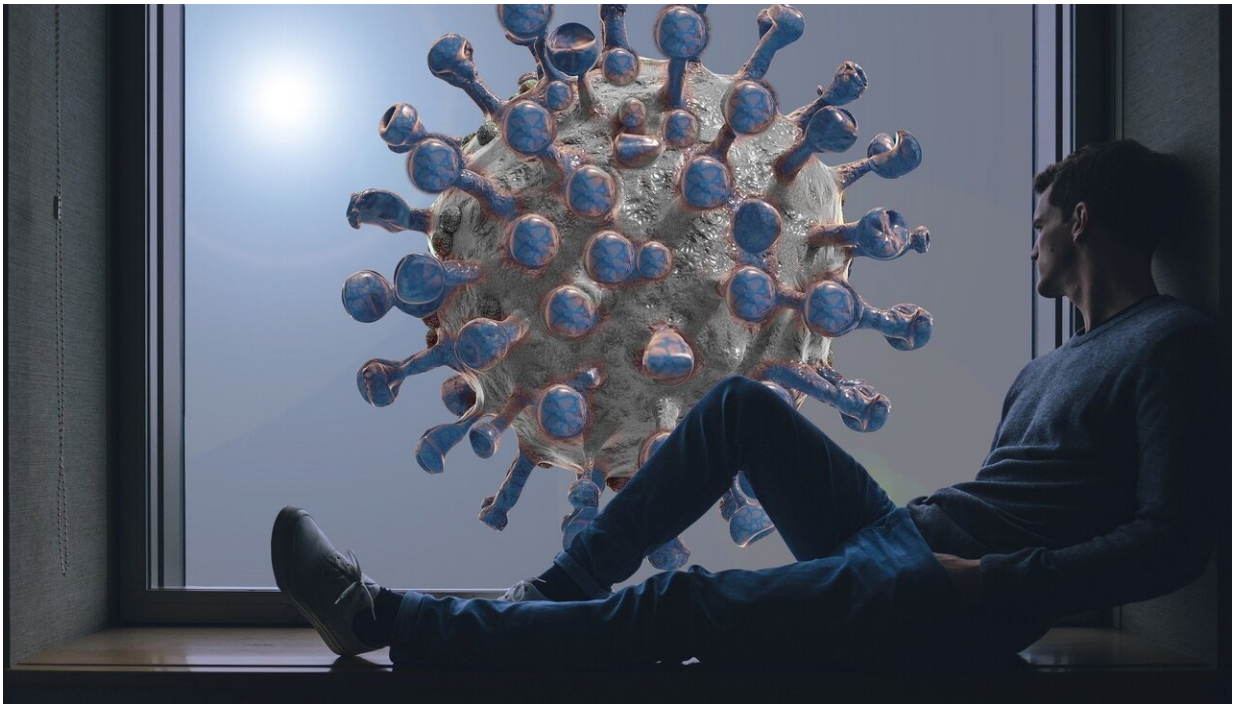


# Russia sees drastic increase in mortality due to COVID-19 in 2020

February 8 2021

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Russia recorded a dramatic increase in mortality in 2020 fuelled by the coronavirus pandemic, according to new official figures released Monday that showed more than 162,000 virus-related deaths.

The preliminary estimates published by the Rosstat statistics agency

showed that mortality had increased by 17.9 percent compared to 2019, Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said Monday.

"This excess mortality includes mortality due to COVID," she said during a coronavirus briefing broadcast on state television.

Rosstat's figures showed that between April, when the [pandemic](#) hit Russia, and December, the country saw 162,429 coronavirus-related fatalities.

December was the deadliest month of the pandemic last year, with 44,435 virus-related deaths.

According to Rosstat's breakdown, 31,550 of those fatalities were mainly due to COVID-19, while in another 12,885 the patient tested positive but the virus was not considered the main cause of death.

On Monday, health officials in Moscow, long the epicentre of Russia's outbreak, published statistics showing a large number of deaths due to the coronavirus.

In a statement, Moscow's health department said 16,546 people had died in December, an increase of 5,988 fatalities on the previous year—almost all of them were due to COVID-19.

In total, 2.12 million people died in Russia in 2020 compared to 1.8 million in 2019, according to Rosstat, with the pandemic exacerbating a demographic crisis the country has faced since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Last year, Russia's population shrank by more than 510,000 people, the largest drop since the mid-2000s, according to official statistics published in late January.

## Conflicting figures

Russia has prided itself on its response to COVID-19, pointing to a low fatality rate as evidence of its success.

But for much of the pandemic Russia only published partial figures, counting only fatalities where COVID-19 was found to be the primary cause of death after autopsy.

Alexei Raksha, a demographer who left Rosstat last year, told AFP in December that the Russian health ministry and the consumer health ministry falsify [coronavirus](#) numbers.

By Monday, Russia's [health officials](#) had reported just 77,068 virus fatalities.

Unlike when the pandemic struck in the spring, the government did not impose a lockdown when the country was hit with a second wave of infections in the fall.

In the hopes of buttressing a struggling economy officials instead pinned their hopes on the country's homemade vaccine, Sputnik V, which has been available to the public since December.

On Monday, Golikova said social distancing and other epidemiological measures would remain in place until nearly 69 million people in the country of some 150 million were vaccinated.

But recent polls have shown that Russians are in no hurry to get the vaccine, with just 38 percent saying they will get inoculated against COVID-19.

And Russian officials have not said how many people have been

inoculated so far nationwide.

Last month Moscow's Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said the city had vaccinated 300,000 people, while the official Twitter account for Sputnik V said that 1.5 million had been administered the jab across Russia.

Golikova on Monday said that the country has produced 8.6 million doses of vaccines—including EpiVacCorona, Russia's second homemade jab—with 5.5 million doses available to the public.

Despite a sluggish mass vaccination campaign, life in Moscow has nonetheless all but returned to normal, with authorities last month lifting restrictions on in-[office workers](#) and allowing bars and restaurants to work through the night.

And Golikova Monday emphasised that the pandemic was on the wane, noting that virus-related deaths dropped by 11 percent in January.

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