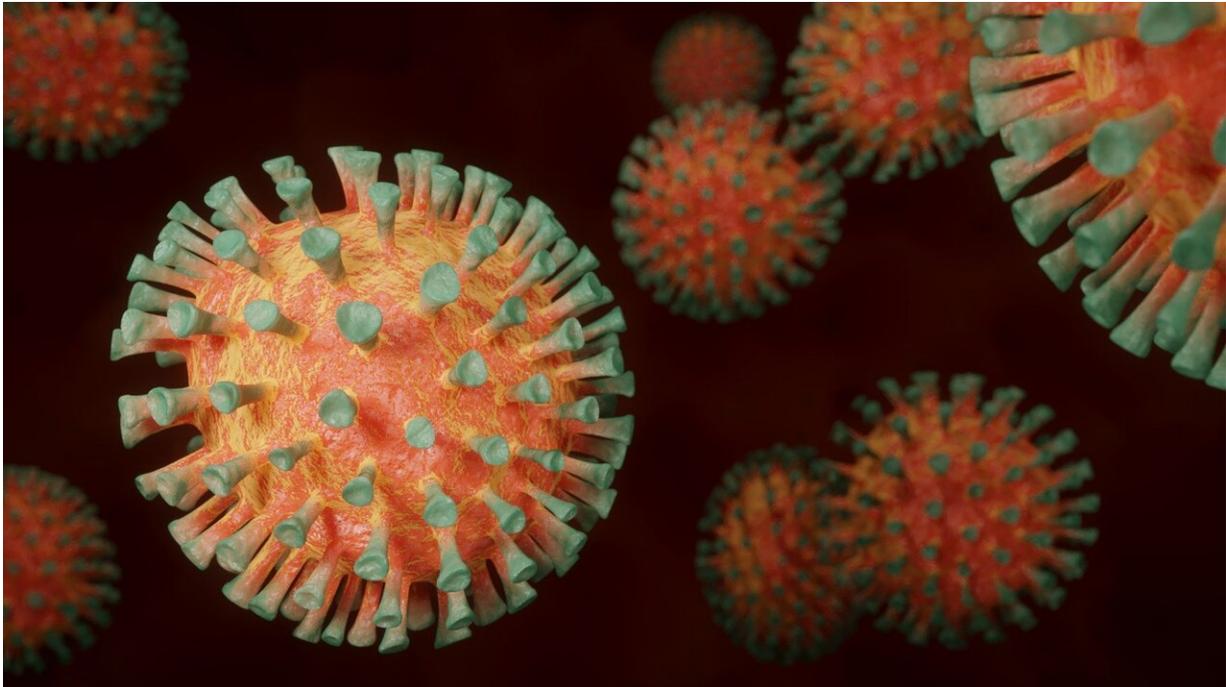


Russia has vaccinated two million, says Putin

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Russia has fully vaccinated two million people with its homegrown jabs, President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday, while another two million have received the first of a two-dose shot.

The figures, revealed by the Russian leader in a conversation with volunteers, show how far the country has to go before all of its 146 million people are inoculated against COVID-19, nearly three months

after it began vaccinating its citizens.

"Over two million people have received two components of the vaccine to date," the Russian president said in televised remarks.

Another "two million and change" had received the first dose, he added.

The totals indicate that only about 1.3 percent of Russia's population has been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Putin also noted that nine of Russia's 85 regions had not yet administered any doses.

Surveys suggest vaccine scepticism is on the rise in Russia, with just 30 percent of respondents to a recent poll by the independent Levada Centre saying they would get the jab compared with 38 percent in December.

Putin once again claimed that Russia had developed the world's best vaccines against the coronavirus, saying they were better than the Pfizer and AstraZeneca jabs.

But he added: "We are not gloating in any way."

Last month, medical journal *The Lancet* published data that found Sputnik V to be 91.6 percent effective, while the New England Journal of Medicine reported that Pfizer was 94 percent effective.

The 68-year-old Russian leader has not yet received a coronavirus vaccine.

In addition to Sputnik V, Russia's homemade jabs include EpiVacCorona—which is already in circulation—and CoviVac, which

Russia plans to introduce this month.

Putin also boasted on Thursday that Moscow has all but returned to normal life, while much of Europe has kept strict lockdown restrictions in place.

Unlike most European countries, Russia did not reimpose a nationwide lockdown when a second wave of infections surged in autumn, which critics say has resulted in a high fatality total from COVID-19.

Last month figures released by the Rosstat statistics agency showed more than 162,000 virus-related deaths in 2020.

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