

Official: Nearly 70% of medical workers in Moscow vaccinated

July 15 2021, by Daria Litvinova and Kostya Manenkov



A medic wearing a special suit to protect against coronavirus prepares to treat a patient with coronavirus at the City hospital No. 52 for coronavirus patients in Moscow, Russia, Tuesday, July 13, 2021. Russia has been facing a rapid surge of coronavirus infections in recent weeks, with the number of daily confirmed cases soaring from about 9,000 in early June to over 25,000 last week. For the first time in the pandemic, the daily death toll exceeded 700 last Tuesday and has remained at that level ever since. Credit: AP Photo/Denis Kaminev

The majority of medical workers, teachers and social workers in Moscow have been vaccinated against the coronavirus a month after authorities in the Russian capital mandated the shots for many of those employed in health care, education, retail, public transport and hospitality and services sector.

Deputy Mayor Anastasia Rakova said Wednesday that nearly 70% of medical workers, 66% of those working in Moscow education facilities and 76% of social workers have been vaccinated. Her statement came a day before the Thursday deadline authorities set for eligible companies and institutions a month ago to ensure that 60% of their staff receive at least one vaccine shot.

Russia has been facing a rapid surge of coronavirus infections in recent weeks, with the number of daily confirmed cases soaring from about 9,000 in early June to over 25,000 last week. For the first time in the pandemic, the daily death toll exceeded 700 last Tuesday and has remained at that level ever since. On Thursday, Russia's state coronavirus task force reported 25,293 new contagions and record 791 deaths.

Russia's vaccination rates, in the meantime, have lagged compared to other nations. As of Tuesday, 28.6 million Russians—or just 19.5% of the 146 million population—have received at least one shot of a vaccine.

In light of the surge and low vaccine uptake, authorities in nearly 30 Russian regions have made vaccinations mandatory for certain groups of people, like those employed in health care, education, retail, public transport, government offices and services sector.



Medics wearing special suits to protect against coronavirus transport a patient with coronavirus at the City hospital No. 52 for coronavirus patients in Moscow, Russia, Tuesday, July 13, 2021. Russia has been facing a rapid surge of coronavirus infections in recent weeks, with the number of daily confirmed cases soaring from about 9,000 in early June to over 25,000 last week. For the first time in the pandemic, the daily death toll exceeded 700 last Tuesday and has remained at that level ever since. Credit: AP Photo/Denis Kaminev

Moscow and the region surrounding it were the first to announce the measure a month ago. Businesses and institutions were ordered to ensure that 60% of staff get at least one shot of a coronavirus vaccine by July 15 and are fully vaccinated by Aug. 15. Otherwise employers would have to suspend unvaccinated workers without pay and face steep fines.

Business owners say meeting the deadline was a challenging task. Oleg Sirota, founder of a cheese factory 40 kilometers west of Moscow that has dozens of retail outlets in and around the Russian capital, said that as of Thursday, 70% of staff have received their shots, but the reluctance was difficult to overcome.

"We started pressuring people (after the mandate was introduced), and people were simply scared," Sirota told The Associated Press. "Many don't understand that the vaccine is safe. Many have doubts. Many think they can't get inoculated because they suffer from certain conditions."



Russian cheese maker Oleg Sirota gestures during his interview with the Associated Press in Dubrovskoye village, in Istra district, 51 km. (31,8 miles) west of Moscow, Russia, Thursday, July 15, 2021. Thursday is the deadline the authorities set for eligible companies to ensure that 60% of their staff receive at

least one shot of a vaccine. Sirota, founder of a cheese factory that has dozens of retail outlets in and around the Russian capital, said that as of Thursday, 70% of staff have received their shots, but the reluctance was difficult to overcome.

Credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko



Russian cheese maker Oleg Sirota speaks on the phone after his interview with the Associated Press in Dubrovskoye village, in Istra district, 51 km. (31,8 miles) west of Moscow, Russia, Thursday, July 15, 2021. Thursday is the deadline the authorities set for eligible companies to ensure that 60% of their staff receive at least one shot of a vaccine. Sirota, founder of a cheese factory that has dozens of retail outlets in and around the Russian capital, said that as of Thursday, 70% of staff have received their shots, but the reluctance was difficult to overcome.

Credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko



A medical worker prepares to give an injection of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine to an employee of Oleg Sirota's cheese factory in Dubrovskoye village, in Istra district, 51 km. (31,8 miles) west of Moscow, Russia, Thursday, July 15, 2021. Thursday is the deadline the authorities set for eligible companies to ensure that 60% of their staff receive at least one shot of a vaccine. Sirota, founder of a cheese factory that has dozens of retail outlets in and around the Russian capital, said that as of Thursday, 70% of staff have received their shots, but the reluctance was difficult to overcome. Credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko



A woman climbs the stairs to queue for a COVID-19 vaccine at a vaccination center in Gostiny Dvor, a huge exhibition center, in Moscow, Russia, Tuesday, July 13, 2021. The banner, center, reads "We will defeat COVID-19 together!". Russia gave Sputnik V regulatory approval in August 2020, raising criticism at home and abroad because it had only been tested on a few dozen people at the time. Credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko

Some have quit because they were unwilling to get vaccinated. Sirota said that 10 of his employees resigned, and he expects to lose about 10% of the 250 people he employs.

Russian media reported earlier this week that the Moscow metro has been already suspending employees that haven't gotten vaccinated. The metro rejected a request for comment sent by the AP and referenced an

online statement by the Moscow transport department, in which it denies reports about suspending those who are medically exempt from vaccination.

Nearly 70% of those employed in the public transport sector in Moscow have been vaccinated, the statement said.

Public Transport Workers Union chairman Yuri Dashkov said the union currently works with about 30 workers who have been suspended already.

Moscow tram driver Alexander Petukhov told the AP he refused to get vaccinated and was suspended last week. Petukhov cited "unknown consequences" of the shot.

"I think everyone should decide for themselves whether to get vaccinated or not. I am not against vaccination, I'm against mandatory measures," he said.

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Citation: Official: Nearly 70% of medical workers in Moscow vaccinated (2021, July 15) retrieved 2 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-medical-workers-moscow-vaccinated.html>

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