

Russia blames increase in deaths in June on delta variant

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In this May 15, 2020, file photo, gravediggers in protective suits carry the coffin of a COVID-19 victim as relatives and friends stand at a distance in the section of a cemetery reserved for coronavirus victims in Kolpino, outside St. Petersburg, Russia. The head of Russia's state coronavirus task force says the number of deaths nationwide in June this year rose nearly 14 percent over June 2020. That's due to the spread of the delta variant of the virus that caused infections to soar and a record spike in deaths. Russia has suffered a surge of infections since early June, with daily new cases rising from about 9,000 in the

beginning of the summer to over 23,000 in early July. For the first time in the pandemic, the daily death toll has exceeded 700, with 726 new deaths registered Friday. Credit: AP Photo/Dmitri Lovetsky, File

The head of Russia's state coronavirus task force says the number of deaths nationwide in June this year rose nearly 14% over June 2020, due to the spread of the delta variant that caused infections to soar and a record spike in deaths.

Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova said Friday that current data show a 13.9% increase in mortality in June, year-on-year.

Russia has been struggling with a surge of infections since early June, with daily new cases rising from about 9,000 at the beginning of the summer to over 23,000 in early July. On Friday, the [task force](#) reported 25,766 new infections. For the first time in the pandemic, the daily death toll this week exceeded 700, with 726 new deaths registered Friday.

The delta variant is detected in 66% of cases, said Anna Popova, head of Russia's public health agency Rospotrebnadzor.

Overall in the pandemic, Golikova's task force has reported a total of more than 5.7 million confirmed infections and 141,501 deaths.

However, reports by Russia's state statistical service Rosstat that tally coronavirus-linked deaths retroactively reveal much higher numbers. According to Rosstat, last year alone COVID-19 was the cause of 144,691 deaths.

Data for the first five months of this year show 126,049 deaths of people

with COVID-19, including cases where the virus was suspected but not confirmed and cases where it wasn't deemed the main cause of death.

A report released Friday showed that 18,695 people who had coronavirus died in May this year—the lowest monthly tally the agency reported for 2021. Out of the total number of deaths, 12,779 were directly caused by confirmed COVID-19; 2,192 were likely caused by the virus, but it wasn't confirmed by a test. In 984 cases, the virus "significantly" contributed to fatal complications of other diseases, and 2,740 people tested positive for the virus but died of other causes.

Russian officials ascribe that to different counting methods, saying the task force only includes deaths where COVID-19 was the main cause and uses data from [medical facilities](#), while Rosstat takes its numbers from civil registry offices where registering a death is finalized, which allows for a fuller picture.

Rosstat started releasing detailed monthly updates on virus-linked deaths last June, after the task force's relatively low [death](#) count raised eyebrows in the West as Russia's tally of confirmed coronavirus cases became one of the world's largest.

Critics and Western media alleged back then that Russian authorities might have been falsifying the numbers for political purposes to downplay the scale of the outbreak, accusations that officials vehemently denied. The Kremlin credited the government's response measures for Russia's low COVID-19 mortality, and experts cited the way Russia counts virus deaths as one of the reasons behind the relatively low numbers reported.

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