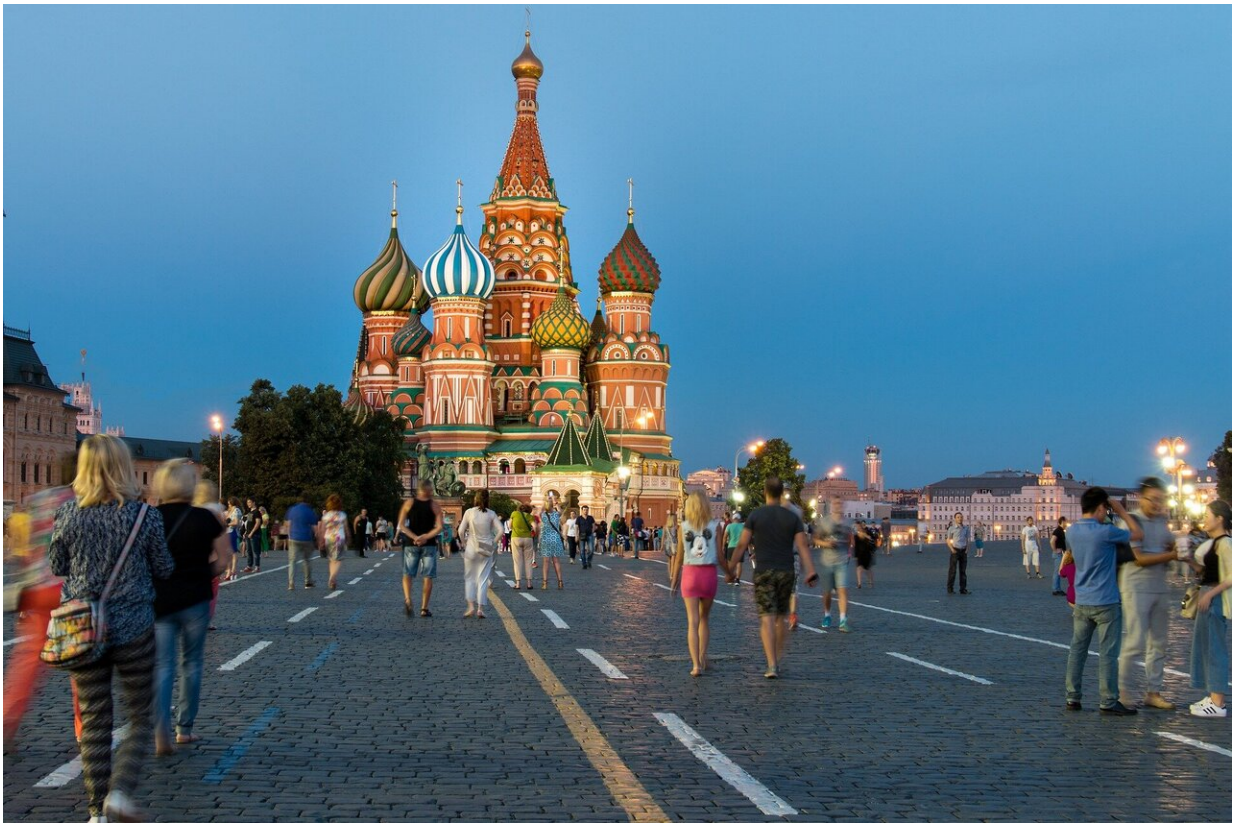


Russia reports record daily coronavirus deaths

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Russia on Tuesday recorded its highest daily coronavirus death toll yet, following an increase in cases linked to the Delta variant and a lacklustre vaccination drive.

A government tally reported 852 fatalities over the past 24 hours, a record in Russia since the start of the pandemic.

The new figure brings the country's total deaths from COVID-19 to 205,531—the highest in Europe.

Authorities have been accused of downplaying the severity of the outbreak.

Under a broader definition for deaths linked to the coronavirus, statistics agency Rosstat reported in late August that Russia had seen more than 350,000 fatalities.

The world's fifth worst-hit country with more than seven million infections, Russia has seen cases climb since last month as vaccinations stall.

Moscow, the epicentre of the outbreak, has experienced a spike over the past week, with authorities warning of rising hospital admissions.

Deputy mayor Anastasia Rakova has said that the highly contagious Delta variant now accounts for all of the cases in the Russian capital.

Authorities face a vaccine-sceptic population, with polls showing that a majority of Russians do not plan to get jabbed.

In Moscow, 52-year-old Olga Samarina said she did not plan to get the shot as she had never had COVID.

"Why get vaccinated against a disease that doesn't bother me," she told AFP.

She said she was not tracking Russia's death totals, but said they "do not

scare me".

The Kremlin initially set a goal of fully inoculating 60 percent of Russia's population by September, but later dropped that target although free jabs have been available since early December.

As of Tuesday, only 28 percent of the population had been fully vaccinated, according to the Gogov website, which tallies COVID data from the regions.

President Vladimir Putin said earlier this month that he was self-isolating after dozens of cases were detected in his inner circle.

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