

Ukraine on verge of deadliest Covid wave: experts

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Ukraine is on the brink of its most deadly period of the coronavirus pandemic, medical experts in the ex-Soviet country warned Friday, with vaccination rates struggling and infections on the rise.

The country of 40 million people and an ageing health care system initially struggled to secure jabs and has since been slow to distribute inoculations to a vaccine sceptic population.

New infections have steadily been increasing, with 27,600 new cases recorded in the last seven days compared to 17,000 in the previous week.

Health officials in Kiev Friday recorded the highest number of new cases since May, while average daily hospitalisations rose by nearly 400 people this week compared to last week.

"This wave will mostly likely be the deadliest," former deputy [health minister](#) and founder of the Centre for Public Health Analysis, Pavlo Kovtonyuk, told AFP.

"We have very few people who are vaccinated to hold it back," Kovtonyuk added.

Just 12 percent of Ukrainians are fully inoculated with one of four vaccines available in the country, including AstraZeneca and Moderna while anti-vaccine sentiment is high.

Yuri Ganychenko, head of the Health Economics Centre at the Kiev School of Economics, said that although the authorities were unable to detect the dominant strain infecting Ukrainians, there was a "high probability" it was the Delta variant.

The wave was likely to peak in mid-October and continue into November with 350 to 400 fatalities per day, Ganychenko said, compared to around 220 earlier in the year.

The Ukrainian security service (SBU) said Friday it had dismantled a network of 5,000 internet bots tasked with "discrediting" and "disrupting" the country's vaccine programme.

The network was directed by "Russian sponsors", the SBU said in a statement.

Both analysts said Ukraine's hospital network was better prepared compared to the beginning of the pandemic, but "no matter how we prepare our hospitals, they will be overcrowded," Kovtonyuk said of the coming wave.

The government earlier this week announced new virus restrictions would enter into force Monday.

Ukraine has recorded over 2.3 million cases and more than 55,000 deaths from the virus since the start of the pandemic.

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