

Bulgaria's hospitals overwhelmed by COVID-19 infection surge

October 29 2021, by Veselin Toshkov



Georgi Georgiev, head of the intensive care unit at Pirogov, Sofia's main emergency hospital, examines a patient, in Sofia, Bulgaria, Friday, Oct. 29, 2021. Medics at Bulgaria's main emergency hospital are fighting an uneven battle with the spread of the coronavirus as a new surge in cases has left its ailing health care system overwhelmed. Georgiev blamed the surge in infections on the widespread vaccine skepticism among Bulgarians, who have turned the country into the EU's least vaccinated nation. Credit: AP Photo Valentina Petrova

Medical workers at Bulgaria's main emergency hospital are waging an uphill battle as a surge in coronavirus cases has overwhelmed the country's ailing health care system.

Following a relatively quiet summer, the Balkan country has been hit hard by another wave of the pandemic as it failed to take tighter containment measures. Bulgaria's health woes have been compounded by a prolonged political crisis that has left the country without a regular government since last spring, eroding [public trust](#) in institutions.

Bulgarian health officials blame public mistrust in vaccines and the government—just 1 in 4 adults is fully vaccinated—for the country's current virus predicament.

On Friday, more than 7,553 people were in Bulgarian COVID-19 wards, including 656 in intensive care. More than 90% of the patients were not vaccinated, data showed.

In addition, 5,178 new infections and 124 more deaths were reported, bringing the country's death toll to 23,718. Bulgaria has had the highest COVID-19 mortality rate in the 27-nation European Union in the past two weeks.

In response to the worsening situation, Bulgarian hospitals are suspending planned admissions and operations and switching units over to handle the rising numbers of COVID-19 patients.



Medics work at the intensive care unit of the Emergency University Hospital Pirogov, in Sofia, Bulgaria, Friday, Oct. 29, 2021. Medics at Bulgaria's main emergency hospital are fighting an uneven battle with the spread of the coronavirus as a new surge in cases has left its ailing health care system overwhelmed. On Friday, more than 7,553 people were in COVID wards, including 656 of them in intensive care. More than 90% of the patients were not vaccinated, data showed. Credit: AP Photo Valentina Petrova



Georgi Georgiev, head of the intensive care unit at Pirogov, Sofia's main emergency hospital, prepares for work, in Sofia, Bulgaria, Friday, Oct. 29, 2021. Medics at Bulgaria's main emergency hospital are fighting an uneven battle with the spread of the coronavirus as a new surge in cases has left its ailing health care system overwhelmed. Georgiev blamed the surge in infections on the widespread vaccine skepticism among Bulgarians, who have turned the country into the EU's least vaccinated nation. Credit: AP Photo Valentina Petrova



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Protesters carry Bulgarian flags and make noise using restaurant equipment during a national protest of restaurant owners, chefs, waiters, and bartenders, in Sofia, Bulgaria, Thursday Oct. 28, 2021. Thousands people took to the streets in many cities across Bulgaria to demonstrate against a government's decision to impose a mandatory COVID-19 health pass for access to indoor places. Credit: AP Photo Valentina Petrova



Protesters hold Bulgarian flags as they march during a national protest of restaurant owners, chefs, waiters, and bartenders, in Sofia, Bulgaria, Thursday Oct. 28, 2021. Thousands people took to the streets in many cities across Bulgaria to demonstrate against a government's decision to impose a mandatory COVID-19 health pass for access to indoor places. Credit: AP Photo Valentina Petrova

"Currently, we are experiencing one of the most difficult periods since the beginning of the pandemic," said Georgi Georgiev, head of the intensive care unit at Pirogov, Sofia's main emergency hospital.

He was concerned about the grave situation that many COVID-19 patients were in and complained about a shortage of medical

professionals trained to handle them.

"The current situation is taking a serious physical and emotional toll. We are exhausted and at our limits," Georgiev said.

The hospital's ICU has transformed three separate rooms to treat COVID-19 patients who need intubation and ventilators, plus 10 rooms for patients with milder symptoms. According to Georgiev, 30% of the COVID-19 patients at the hospital need to be intubated at some point.

Georgiev blamed the surge in infections on the widespread vaccine skepticism among Bulgarians, who have turned the country into the EU's least vaccinated nation.

On Thursday, thousands of people working in the [restaurant industry](#) took to the streets in cities across Bulgaria to protest the government's decision to impose a mandatory COVID-19 health pass for access to indoor places.

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