

Russia's virus infections over 8 million; daily deaths high

October 18 2021, by Jim Heintz



A woman wipes her face as she walks past an empty columbarium wall prepared for funerary urns holding cremated remains of the deceased, near a crematorium in St. Petersburg, Russia, Monday, Oct. 18, 2021. Russia's total number of coronavirus infections has topped 8 million and the daily infection toll hit a new record. The death toll is minutely lower than the record 1,002 tallied on Saturday, but it shows the country continuing to struggle with the virus as vaccination rates remain low. Credit: AP Photo/Dmitri Lovetsky

Russia's total number of coronavirus infections has topped 8 million, more than 5% of the population, and the daily infection toll hit a new record.

The national coronavirus task force said Monday that 34,325 new infections over the past day raised the pandemic total to 8,027,012. It also said 998 people died of COVID-19 in the previous day, bringing the total number of deaths to 224,310—the highest virus death toll in Europe.

The daily death toll is minutely lower than the record 1,002 tallied on Saturday, but shows that Russia is still struggling with the virus as vaccination rates remain low.

Russian authorities have tried to speed up the pace of vaccinations with lotteries, bonuses and other incentives, but widespread vaccine skepticism and conflicting signals from officials have stymied the efforts. The task force said Monday that about 45 million Russians, or 32% of the country's nearly 146 million people, are fully vaccinated.

Despite the mounting toll, the Kremlin has ruled out a new nationwide lockdown like the one early on in the pandemic that badly hurt the economy and dented President Vladimir Putin's popularity. Instead, it has delegated the power to enforce coronavirus restrictions to regional authorities.

Some of Russia's 85 regions have restricted attendance at large public events and limited access to theaters, restaurants and other venues.



Medical workers carry a patient suspected of having coronavirus on a stretcher at a hospital in Kommunarka, outside Moscow, Russia, Saturday, Oct. 16, 2021. Russia's daily death toll from COVID-19 has exceeded 1000 for the first time as the country faces a sustained wave of rising infections. Credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko

The authorities in St. Petersburg, Russia's second-largest city, on Monday introduced digital codes that must be shown beginning Nov. 1 proving vaccination or past infection to enter conferences and sports events. Starting on Nov. 15, those codes will be required at movies, theaters, museums and gyms and on Dec. 1 they become mandatory at restaurants, cafes and some stores.

The city has reported the nation's second-largest number of new

infections after Moscow.

Moscow authorities so far have refrained from tightening coronavirus restrictions despite the mounting caseload and daily life in the capital has remained largely as normal.

The highest concentrations of new cases are mostly in comparatively urbanized western Russia and in the developed areas along the Pacific Coast such as Vladivostok and Khabarovsk. Still, the sparsely populated Siberian region of Sakha and Chukotka in the extreme northeast is also showing high case rates of more than 150 infections per 100,000 people over a seven-day period.

The official COVID-19 toll ranks Russia as having the fifth-most pandemic deaths in the world following the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico.

However, state statistics agency Rosstat, which also counts deaths in which the virus wasn't considered the main cause, has reported a much higher pandemic death toll—about 418,000 people with COVID-19 as of August. Based on that number, Russia would be the fourth hardest-hit nation, ahead of Mexico.

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