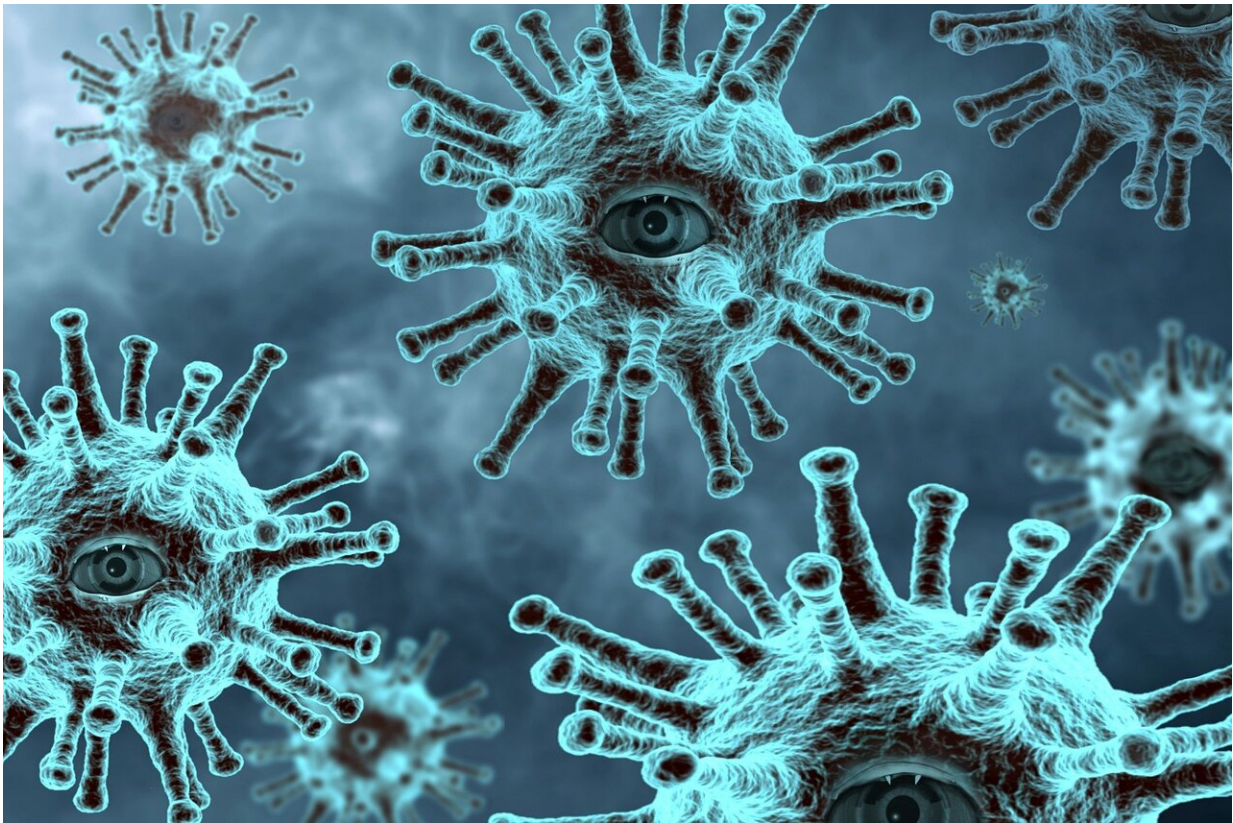


Russia reports record daily virus cases, deaths

October 14 2021



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Russia on Thursday reported a pandemic high for both new coronavirus infections and fatalities over 24 hours, with the country's vaccination drive at a snail's pace and few restrictions in place.

Officials registered 31,299 new infections and 986 deaths from COVID-19 over 24 hours, bringing Russia's total fatalities to 220,315—the highest toll in Europe.

The surging outbreak has come with just 31 percent of Russians fully inoculated, according to the Gogov website, which tallies COVID-19 data from the regions.

A lack of tough restrictions has allowed the virus to spread, though a number of regions have re-introduced QR codes for access to [public places](#).

The Kremlin has balked at re-introducing major restrictions despite calling the country's vaccination rate "unacceptably" low, saying this week authorities have to ensure "the economy continues working."

On Thursday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov once again ruled out a lockdown and said that authorities have to "continue to explain to people that it is necessary to be vaccinated".

"It's irresponsible not to get the vaccine," he told reporters.

But Peskov added that Russia's healthcare system was prepared for the onslaught in coronavirus patients, saying that it is not "overwhelmed".

"The entire medical infrastructure is mobilised," he said.

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko for his part blamed the growing spread on the "behaviour" of Russians and called on them to get vaccinated.

"If we do not introduce general restriction measures now we run the risk of a continuing rise in cases," he was cited by state news agency TASS as

saying.

He did not, however, specify possible restrictions.

While several Russian-developed jabs have been available for months, authorities have struggled to inoculate a vaccine-sceptic population.

Independent polls show that more than half of Russians do not plan to get a shot.

Moscow—the epicentre of Russia's outbreak—has so far withheld from bringing back restrictions, but on Monday announced that it would open two dozen sites around the capital where residents could get free express tests.

Independent experts have accused authorities of downplaying the severity of Russia's epidemic.

Under a broader definition of deaths linked to the virus, the Rosstat statistics agency said last week that by the end of August more than 400,000 Russians with the coronavirus had died.

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Citation: Russia reports record daily virus cases, deaths (2021, October 14) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-russia-daily-virus-cases-deaths.html>

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