Russia tops 1,000 daily virus deaths for first time

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Russia on Saturday recorded 1,000 deaths over 24 hours for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, with the country's jab drive at a standstill and few restrictions in place.

An official government tally showed 1,002 deaths and 33,208 new infections, setting a high for both fatalities and cases for the third day in

a row.

The surge comes with just 32 percent of Russians fully inoculated, according to official statistics published for the first time Saturday.

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

The Kremlin has avoided re-introducing major measures despite calling the vaccination rate "unacceptably" low, and saying authorities have to ensure "the economy continues working".

It also said Russia's medical system was not "overwhelmed" and prepared to take in the rising number of patients.

Authorities have blamed Russians for the growing outbreak.

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko this week pointed to their "behaviour", while Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said everything had been done to give the public the chance to "save their lives by getting vaccinated".

While several Russian-developed jabs have been available for months, many people remain vaccine-sceptic.

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

"The main preventive measure that helps protect a person and helps to avoid a fatal outcome is vaccination," Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova said on national television Saturday.

In Moscow, residents in interviews Saturday questioned the efficacy of getting vaccinated.

"How many people die per day from the flu or heart attacks or strokes?" said Alexei Kuznetsov, a 48-year-old entrepreneur, who added that he had not been vaccinated.

"I do not really understand why this particular figure is causing such a serious stir."

Anna Nazarova, a 25-year-old anaesthesiologist, said most people who have not come into contact with the virus "do not understand the possible complications".

"There has to be a better campaign to get more people vaccinated," she told AFP.

Russia's fatalities from COVID now stand at 222,315—the highest toll in Europe—even as authorities are accused of downplaying the severity of Russia's outbreak.

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

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