

# As virus cases rise, so do pleas for Russians to get vaccine

October 22 2021, by Yaroslav Gunin

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Medical staff in special suits treat a COVID-19 patient at an ICU in Infectious Hospital No. 23 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. Russians' hesitancy in getting the vaccine is of increasing concern as the country suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitcyn

As she stood in the courtyard of the morgue holding the body of her grandmother who died of COVID-19, Ramilya Shigalturina had a message for anyone still resisting vaccinations.

"I'm begging all Russians: Please get vaccinated, because it's really dreadful and dangerous," said the resident of Nizhny Novgorod, the country's fifth-largest city.

Shigalturina said her 83-year-old grandmother "died right away after catching it. She wasn't vaccinated."

When Russia last year became the first country to launch a coronavirus [vaccine](#), called Sputnik V, it was hailed as a matter of national pride and a sign of its scientific know-how. But since the free immunization program began in December 2020, only about a third of the country's 146 million people have gotten fully vaccinated.

The low vaccine acceptance is of [increasing concern as Russia suffers a sharp rise in cases](#), setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. On Thursday, the national coronavirus task force reported 1,036 deaths and more than 36,000 new infections over the past 24 hours.

"I can't understand what's going on," President Vladimir Putin said, a rare admission of bewilderment from the steely leader. "We have a reliable and efficient vaccine. The vaccine really reduces the risks of illness, grave complications and death."



Ramilya Shigalturina stands in the courtyard of a morgue at Infectious Hospital No. 5 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, Wednesday, on Oct. 20, 2021, as a worker moves a coffin containing the body of her grandmother, who died of COVID-19. Shigalturina said the disease was "really dreadful and dangerous," and she begged Russians to get vaccinated. The resident of Nizhny Novgorod, the country's fifth-largest city, said her 83-year-old grandmother, who was unvaccinated, "died right away after catching it." Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitcyn

At Nizhny Novgorod's Infectious Hospital No. 23, where the seriously ill patients lie in wards with little space between their beds, Dr. Natalia Soloshenko is battered by the onslaught.

"I can tell you that out of every 50 admitted, only one or two of them are

vaccinated," the chief doctor told The Associated Press. "The whole ICU is full of highly critical patients; all of those patients are unvaccinated."

"To be honest, we're not even outraged anymore; we just feel sorry for these people," she said.

Nina Pugacheva is still in the hospital, but is one of the lucky ones—she is recovering.

"Tell everyone to get vaccinated," she said.

Soloshenko said widespread misinformation appears to be driving the vaccine hesitancy.

"It's a very sensitive issue, a burning issue for all health care workers. We read what's on [social media](#) and see the most negative information coming from the citizens of our country regarding vaccination," she said.



Medical staff talk through their face masks at a ward of COVID-19 patients at Infectious Hospital No. 23 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. The low vaccination rate in Russia, where only about a third of the population is fully vaccinated, is causing concern as the country suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitcyn

Many Russians are suspicious of vaccines as a whole because of a distrust of authorities dating to the Soviet era. With Sputnik V, there was widespread concern that it was approved for use before the completion of full clinical trials.

Some critics also have blamed conflicting signals from authorities. While extolling Sputnik V and three other domestic vaccines, state-

controlled media often criticized Western-made shots, a message that many saw as feeding doubts about vaccines in general.

The vaccination rate in the Nizhny Novgorod region, about 400 kilometers (250 miles) east of Moscow, is 44% higher than the national average, but it is seeing a high death rate. The coronavirus task force reported 40 new deaths in the past day—about twice the death rate recorded in Moscow.

As deaths spiked, regional Gov. Gleb Nikitin said new measures would be taken to curb the spread of the infections, but they haven't been announced yet.



A medical worker wearing a special suit to protect against COVID-19 treats a patient at an ICU in Infectious Hospital No. 23 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on

Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. The low vaccination rate in Russia, where only about a third of the population is fully vaccinated, is causing concern as the country suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitycyn



A medical staff member, right, works at a desk in Infectious Hospital No. 23 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. When Russia last year became the first country to launch a coronavirus vaccine, called Sputnik V, it was hailed as matter of national pride and a sign of its scientific know-how. But since the free immunization program began in December 2020, only about a third of the country's 146 million people have gotten fully vaccinated. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitycyn



A medical staff member wearing a special suit to protect against COVID-19 treats a patient at an ICU in Infectious Hospital No. 23 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. The low vaccination rate in Russia, where only about a third of the population is fully vaccinated, is causing concern as the country suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitycyn



Dr. Natalia Soloshenko of Infectious Hospital No. 23 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, talks about the coronavirus on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. At the hospital where the seriously ill patients lie in wards with little space between their beds, Soloshenko is battered by the onslaught. "I can tell you that out of every 50 admitted, only one or two of them are vaccinated," the chief doctor told The Associated Press. "The whole ICU is full of highly critical patients; all of those patients are unvaccinated." Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitcyn



Medical staff members talk to each other on the phone as one of them treats patients with coronavirus at an ICU in Infectious Hospital No. 23 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. The low vaccination rate in Russia, where only about a third of the population is fully vaccinated, is causing concern as the country suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitcyn



Medical staff in protective suits work at an ICU in Infectious Hospital No. 2 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. The low vaccination rate in Russia, where only about a third of the population is fully vaccinated, is causing concern as the country suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitsyn



A medical staff member in a protective suit treats a COVID-19 patient at an ICU in Infectious Hospital No. 2 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. The low vaccination rate in Russia, where only about a third of the population is fully vaccinated, is causing concern as the country suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitcyn



A funeral worker carries a coffin cover for a patient who died of COVID-19 at Infectious Hospital No. 5 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. The low vaccination rate in Russia, where only about a third of the population is fully vaccinated, is causing concern as the country suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitsyn



Medical workers in protective suits move a coffin with the body of a COVID-19 victim at the morgue of Infectious Hospital No. 5 in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021. The low vaccination rate in Russia, where only about a third of the population is fully vaccinated, is causing concern as the country suffers a sharp rise in cases, setting records for infections and deaths nearly every day this month. Credit: AP Photo/Roman Yarovitsyn

Putin on Wednesday ordered Russians to stay away from work from Oct. 30 to Nov. 7, a period that includes a four-day national holiday.

Moscow and St. Petersburg, the two most populous Russian cities and the country's key political, business and cultural centers, have gone further, announcing new restrictions following months of inaction.

In Moscow, gyms, cinemas, entertainment venues and most stores are to be closed from Oct. 28 to Nov. 7; and restaurants will be open only for takeout or delivery.

The authorities in St. Petersburg on Monday introduced digital codes for proving vaccination that must be shown beginning Nov. 1 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 will be mandatory at restaurants, cafes and some stores.

A similar code system was tried in Moscow over the summer but was abandoned after a few weeks amid complaints from restaurant owners about tanking revenue.

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