

# Romania, Bulgaria hit pandemic death highs amid vaccines lag

November 2 2021, by Stephen McGrath

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Medical personnel in protective suits push a Corona intensive care patient from the a Romanian Air Force C-27 plane into a Bundeswehr intensive care ambulance on the tarmac at Hamburg Airport in Hamburg, Germany, Tuesday, Nov. 2, 2021. Six seriously ill Corona patients from Romania are transport to Hamburg for treatment. Credit: Gregor Fischer/dpa via AP

Romania reported a record daily number of 591 COVID-19 deaths Tuesday amid a persistently low vaccination rate and a wave of coronavirus infections that has overwhelmed the country's ailing health care system.

Only 37% of adults in Romania, a European Union member with around 19 million people, have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 compared to an EU average of 75%. Within the 27-nation EU, only Bulgaria has a smaller share of its population vaccinated.

Romanian authorities said Tuesday that 541 of the 591 people who had died of COVID-19 since the day before were unvaccinated. More than 1,800 COVID-19 patients were in intensive care Tuesday.

The unfolding disaster prompted authorities to impose tighter restrictions starting last week. Vaccination certificates are required for many day-to-day activities, such as going to the gym, the cinema or a shopping mall. For everyone, there is a 10 p.m. curfew.

Octavian Jurma, a doctor and health statistician, told The Associated Press that Romania's high COVID-19 mortality rate is the result of strong-anti-vaccination movements, poor medical education and a national response that has failed to curb the health crisis.

"There was no (government) communication strategy whatsoever, and no education strategy. The only people communicating, and very effectively, are the anti-vaxxers and the negationist movements," Jurma said Tuesday. "The truth is that this pandemic wave was left to peak completely unmitigated—and the whole burden was put on the hospitals."

The number of vaccines administered in Romania—where nearly 50,000 people have died of COVID-19—increased through October and

reached a daily record of 150,000 doses. But the number fell over the last week, declining to around 75,000 doses on Monday.



In this Friday, Oct. 22, 2021 file photo, patients lie on beds in a crowded COVID-19 isolation room at the University Emergency Hospital in Bucharest, Romania. Romania has on Tuesday, Nov. 2 reported a record daily number of 591 COVID-19 deaths amid a persistently low vaccination rate. Only 37% of Romania's adults have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 compared to a European Union average of 75%. Credit: AP Photo/Andreea Alexandru, file

Other Central and Eastern European countries with low vaccination rates are facing similar virus surges.

Bulgaria, where 25% of adults have been fully vaccinated, also reported its highest daily pandemic death toll Tuesday; of the 310 who died in 24 hours, more than 90% were unvaccinated, authorities said.

Bulgarian Health Minister Stoycho Katsarov on Tuesday called the situation "a national disaster."

Croatia, a country of 4.2 million, reported its highest daily death toll since May on Tuesday, when officials said 40 more COVID-19 patients had died since a day earlier. Authorities are setting up more vaccination sites in the capital, Zagreb.

In countries such as Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, where vaccination rates have reached around 50% of the population, new waves of infections have led to steps to reduce the pressure on hospitals while authorities try to stimulate vaccine uptake.

In Slovenia, an EU country of 2 million people, hospitals suspended non-urgent medical interventions Tuesday to free up space for COVID-19 patients.

Robert Carotta, the national coordinator for COVID-19 wards in Slovenia's hospitals, told local news agency STA that the number of patients is growing at the fastest pace since the start of the pandemic. If the pace continues, the country's health care system will be overwhelmed, he said.

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Citation: Romania, Bulgaria hit pandemic death highs amid vaccines lag (2021, November 2) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-11-romania-pandemic-death-vaccines-lag.html>

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