

Russia shutdown ends despite coronavirus wave

November 8 2021



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Most of Russia on Monday ended a week-long paid holiday aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus, despite the country seeing thousands of new cases and more than 1,000 deaths per day.

President Vladimir Putin ordered the paid holiday period from October 30 to November 7 in a bid to stem soaring infections and deaths

exacerbated by a slow vaccination drive.

Individual regions had the authority to extend the period but as of Monday only five had done so, including the western region of Bryansk and the northwestern region of Novgorod.

A number of regions did however introduce or extend a requirement for proof of vaccination to visit restaurants, cafes and shopping centres.

In the city of Veliky Novgorod where authorities extended the shutdown, some approved of the measure.

"That's the right thing to do," Antonina Leontyeva, 75, told AFP.

"Maybe there will be fewer patients and fewer infections in a week."

But others said they were growing exasperated.

"I do not like this, this makes me mad," said 19-year-old Alexander Vorotilov. "I cannot go anywhere without a QR-code."

Moscow, the epicentre of the pandemic in Russia, still does not require proof of vaccination for most public activities.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said it was too early to say whether the week-long shutdown would help reduce infections.

"This will only become clear in a week," he told reporters.

With more than 8.8 million cases registered since the start of the pandemic, Russia is one of the worst-hit countries in the world and a devastating wave this autumn has seen infections and deaths reach new records.

On Monday, authorities reported 39,400 new cases and 1,190 fatalities over the previous 24 hours.

The highest number for new infections—41,335—was recorded on Saturday, while the highest number of new deaths—1,195—was reported last Thursday.

Russia has rolled out several homegrown vaccines, including Sputnik V, but only about a third of the population is fully inoculated.

Authorities have been accused of playing down the pandemic and figures from statistics agency Rosstat in October showed nearly twice as many COVID deaths compared with the government tally.

Rosstat said 44,265 people died of coronavirus in September—nearly double the official government figure—bringing the agency's total virus toll to nearly 450,000, the highest in Europe.

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