

# Russia hits all-time high of new infections, blames omicron

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People eat their takeaway food sitting outside a cafe that is closed due to coronavirus in Moscow, Russia, Friday, Oct. 29, 2021. Russia is shortening the required isolation period for people infected with COVID-19 from 14 to seven days. The decision was announced Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2022 as Russia faces a surge of COVID-19 cases driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. Credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko, File

Daily new coronavirus infections in Russia reached an all-time high Friday and authorities blamed the highly contagious omicron variant, which they expect to soon dominate the country's outbreak.

Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova on Friday noted "intensive spread of the omicron variant" and said the authorities "expect it to become the dominating" variant driving the outbreak. The state coronavirus task force Golikova heads reported 49,513 new infections on Friday—the highest yet in the pandemic.

Record numbers of 15,987 new cases and 5,922 cases were reported respectively in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia's second-largest city. In light of the surge, [health officials](#) in St. Petersburg on Friday limited elective outpatient care.

Golikova on Friday urged Russians who received their vaccinations or recovered from the virus more than six months ago to "head to a vaccination point again in order to protect yourself from the virus" with a booster.

Also Friday, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin ordered cabinet members to hold meetings online and have their staff work remotely "where possible."

Just about half of Russia's 146 million people have been fully vaccinated despite the fact that Russia was among the first in the world to approve and roll out a COVID-19 vaccine. In Russia, everyone who received their primary vaccination more than six months ago has been eligible for a [booster shot](#) since July.

Gogov.ru, an independent website that tracks vaccinations, estimates that 8.8 million people have also received a booster shot, out of approximately 21.8 million who qualify.

Daily new infections in Russia have been steadily climbing since Jan. 10, when just over 15,000 new cases were registered—a number that tripled on Friday, surpassing 49,000 in less than two weeks. Friday's daily tally was more than 10,000 higher than the previous day.

Russia's state coronavirus task force has registered 324,752 deaths since the start of the pandemic—by far Europe's worst death toll. Russia's state statistics agency, which uses broader counting criteria, puts the pandemic death toll even higher, saying the overall number of virus-linked deaths between April 2020 and October 2021 was over 625,000.

Russia's authorities admit that current surge could end up as the country's biggest yet but so far haven't announced any major restrictions to stem it.

A nationwide lockdown wasn't being discussed, officials said, and last week the government decided to indefinitely postpone introducing restrictions for unvaccinated people, which would have been extremely unpopular among vaccine-hesitant Russians.

Golikova earlier this week also announced a decision to cut the required isolation period for people infected with COVID-19 from 14 to seven days, although it still remained unclear when that will take effect.

The authorities say the soaring infections so far haven't led to a spike in hospitalizations. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said the current surge is putting more strain on outpatient facilities than on hospitals in the city of nearly 13 million. City officials have increased the number of physicians on duty in outpatient clinics.

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