

Russia's virus clampdown ranges from surveillance to prison

31 March 2020



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Just a week ago President Vladimir Putin declared Russia had the coronavirus outbreak "under control".

Since then, a strict lockdown has been put in place across most regions and parliament has swiftly approved a coronavirus-focused package of legislation including prison terms.

Here are Russia's latest measures.

Confinement spreads

Almost 70 percent of Russia's 147 million population has been ordered into strict confinement following a first announcement by the mayor of Moscow on Sunday.

By Tuesday afternoon, more than 50 regions had followed suit with the same measures that limit time outside to shopping for necessities and walking pets within a 100-metre radius of home.

Some parts of the country have taken additional steps such as stopping [public transport](#) to and from

other regions.

Even Russia's top [coronavirus](#) doctor, Denis Protsenko, who met Putin last week, was self-isolating in his office after testing positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday.

Jail for quarantine dodgers

Russian lawmakers quickly approved punishment for people who "violate sanitary rules", introducing prison sentences of up to seven years in cases where leaving quarantine causes deaths of more than two people.

New fines of up to 50,000 rubles (\$640) would also be imposed on people violating public conduct rules.

The bills, passed by both lower and upper house on Tuesday, include provisions to make medication more accessible and remove some red tape from the registration of new drugs.

Fake news rules

Lawmakers also backed imprisonment for distributing "knowingly false information about circumstances posing a threat to safety and lives."

In case such information, presented as true, causes death, the person found guilty of spreading it would face up to five years in jail.

Amnesty International said the proposed measures, expected to get Putin's assent shortly, "can kill freedom of speech in Russia".

Amnesty and several human rights lawyers warned of a lack of clearly defined terms, a risk of indiscriminate application and likelihood of self-censorship.

Isolation surveillance

The government will enforce the measures with help of telecoms networks and surveillance, at least in Moscow.

Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin on Tuesday ordered Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin to use mobile service providers and city websites to work out a system of control over people's movements in the city.

The news followed media reports of Moscow City Hall plans to make special QR barcodes on demand, to be used by residents as a pass when going out.

The codes would be made through Moscow's online services portal and be required for each trip outside the home, even when taking out the rubbish, Kommersant daily reported, citing a draft document.

The surveillance system would use Moscow's vast camera network, mobile use data, and data about bank card payments, the newspaper said.

Critics blasted the leaked plan as a severe crackdown on constitutional freedoms, with some calling it a "QR concentration camp" and even fearing that it would outlast the pandemic.

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