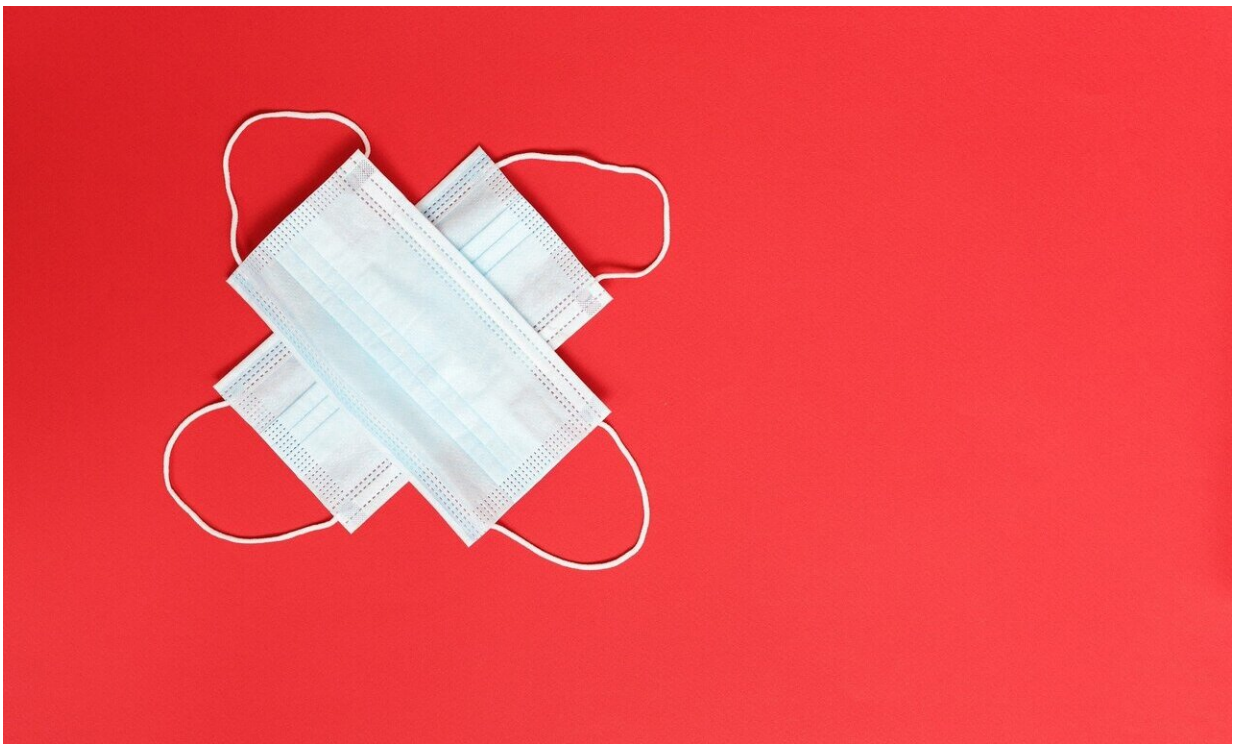
Medical Xpress

Russia sets another COVID record as world battles Delta variant

July 4 2021



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Russia reported its fifth record for daily COVID-19 deaths in a row on Saturday, as countries around the world rushed to contain the rapid spread of the highly contagious Delta variant.

The variant has propelled a resurgence of the virus which has already

killed nearly four million people, forcing numerous nations to reimpose restrictions well over a year after the pandemic first swept the world.

Thousands of troops and police hit the streets in Indonesia to enforce a partial lockdown imposed on Saturday, as the country recorded a record 27,913 new daily cases as well as 493 deaths.

Mosques, restaurants and shopping malls were shuttered in the capital Jakarta, across the main island of Java and on Bali after the daily caseload quadrupled in less than a month, with the Delta variant blamed.

The overwhelmed healthcare system is teetering on the brink of collapse as jammed hospitals turn away patients, leading desperate families to hunt for oxygen tanks to treat the sick and dying at home.

"The stricter restrictions came too late," said Jakarta resident Maya Puspita Sari.

"Before, people who got COVID-19 were strangers, but now it's also the people closest to me who are infected... The virus is getting so much closer and it's terrifying."

Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Myanmar ordered two million people in the second city of Mandalay to stay at home Friday as the coup-hit country struggles to contain coronavirus cases.

New measures were also put in place in Portugal, with a night curfew entering into force for nearly half the population in a bid rein in rising Delta infections.

New waves in Russia, Iran

Russia has so far ruled out a new lockdown to fight surging Delta cases,

even as it reported 697 more deaths on Saturday—setting a new nationwide record for the fifth straight day.

Second city Saint Petersburg hosted a Euro 2020 quarter-final between Spain and Switzerland on Friday night, with concern raised after hundreds of cases were detected among spectators attending games across the continent.

Russia had hoped its vaccination campaign would tamp down a new wave, but it has met with widespread scepticism and a sluggish rollout, with only 16 percent of the 146 million population jabbed.

AFP journalists saw hundreds of people waiting at vaccination points across Moscow on Friday.

"I've been queueing for about two hours already," 21-year-old student Svetlana Stepereva said in the northeast of the capital.

"I want to get a jab and feel safe."

This week President Vladimir Putin urged Russians to "listen to experts" rather than rumours about the virus and vaccines.

Iran, battling the Middle East's deadliest outbreak of the coronavirus, has warned it could be hit by yet another wave of infections.

"It is feared that we are on the way to a fifth wave throughout the country," President Hassan Rouhani told a meeting of Iran's anti-virus taskforce, warning the public to be careful as "the Delta variant has spread" in southern provinces.

Delta rises in Africa, Fiji

The Delta variant, first identified in India and now present in at least 85 countries, has driven outbreaks in places that had previously been able to mostly avoid the pandemic's ravages.

Fiji, which went an entire year without recording any community coronavirus cases until Delta arrived in April, recorded its biggest-ever infection increase on Saturday.

Authorities reported two deaths and warned of more to come as the virus threatens to overwhelm the South Pacific nation's health system.

Africa has also been largely spared the worst of the pandemic, but infection numbers have increased in the continent for six weeks running, driven by the Delta variant.

Deaths rose by 15 percent across 38 African countries to nearly 3,000 in the same period.

"The speed and scale of Africa's third wave is like nothing we've seen before," Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization's regional director for Africa, said this week.

South Africa, the continent's worst-hit country, posted a new record of 24,000 cases on Friday.

"We are indeed... in the eye of the storm of the third wave," Deputy Health Minister Joe Phaahla said.

Meanwhile in Italy 300 healthcare workers have lodged a legal challenge against the requirement that they get vaccinated against coronavirus, according to media reports.

"This isn't a battle by anti-vaxxers but a democratic battle,"

constitutional lawyer Daniele Granara, who helped build up the case, told the Giornale di Brescia newspaper.

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https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-russia-covid-world-delta-variant.html

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