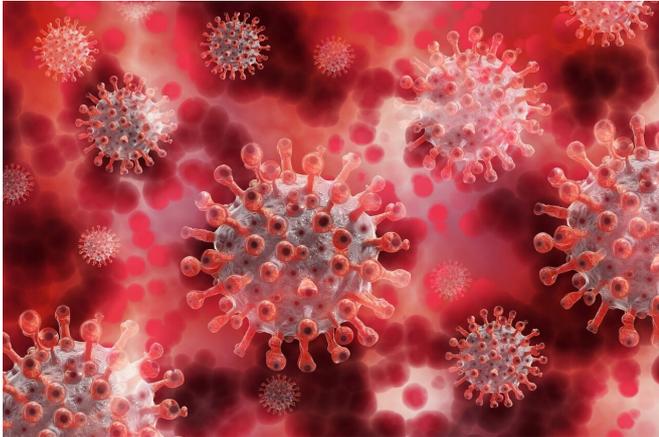# Ukraine hits all-time death record amid vaccine hesitancy

21 October 2021, by Yuras Karmanau

Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Coronavirus infections and deaths in Ukraine surged to all-time highs Thursday amid a laggard pace of vaccination, which is one of the lowest in Europe.

Ukrainian authorities reported 22,415 new confirmed infections and 546 deaths in the past 24 hours, the highest numbers since the start of the pandemic.

Authorities have blamed a spike in infections on a slow pace of vaccination in the 41-million nation. Ukrainians can choose between Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Sinovac vaccines, but only about 15 percent of Ukrainians are fully vaccinated, Europe's lowest level after Armenia.

Overall, the country has registered over 2.7 million infections and 62,389 deaths.

Ukraine has faced a steady rise in contagion in the past few weeks, which forced the government to introduce restrictions on access to public places and the use of public transport. Starting Thursday, proof of vaccination or a negative test is required

to board planes, trains and long-distance buses.

The restrictive measures have made a black market for counterfeit vaccination certificates blossom, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy chaired a meeting earlier this week on ways to combat the practice. Police said they suspect workers at 15 hospitals across the country of involvement in issuing false vaccination certificates.

Despite the rising contagion, the government has been reluctant to introduce another lockdown, trying to avoid further damage to the economy weakened by the conflict with neighboring Russia, which annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and threw its weight behind a separatist insurgency in the country's eastern industrial heartland.

"There are just two ways—vaccination or lockdown," Zelenskyy said. "I'm against the lockdown for the sake of economy."

To encourage vaccination, the authorities have started offering shots in shopping malls. As infections soared, skeptical attitudes began to change and a record number of more than 251,000 people received vaccines over the past 24 hours.

"I'm frightened by a spike in infections, my friend is at a hospital in grave condition," 38-year-old businessman Denys Onuchko said after receiving the first vaccine dose at a Kyiv shopping mall.

Onuchko noted that many Ukrainians have been disinformed by conspiracy theories about vaccines, but now take a more reasonable approach as the situation exacerbates. "People have been scared by stories ... but the real threat must make them sober up," he said.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said that the city hospitals are facing an influx of patients, an

increasing share of them in grave condition.

Yulia Furman, 47, who also received the first vaccine shot, also said that many people in her entourage believed in conspiracy theories about vaccines.

"Many of my friends believed those stories about a global plot and now they are gravely ill, it's now time to protect oneself," she said.

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