

Russian COVID-19 deaths reach record highs while government does nothing

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Coronavirus deaths in Russia are reaching all-time highs, as the federal government does nothing to control the pandemic. Over 970 people died in the country on Tuesday, surpassing the worst moments of the 2021 winter peak. According to the government agency Rosstat, 418,000 Russian citizens have now perished from COVID-19. The real numbers, however, are widely considered to be far higher.

According to the latest numbers from the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), Russia experienced a staggering 71.6 percent increase in mortality over the past 12 months, driven above all by the high mortality from COVID-19. Overall, between September 2020 and August 2021, 2.36 million people died in Russia, while only 1.4 million children were born. The natural population decline has now reached dimensions unseen in the country outside of war times.

Meanwhile, daily confirmed cases continue to climb, and had reached more than 28,000 a day as of Tuesday. Nationwide, there has been a 16 percent increase in infections over the last seven days, and in 11 regions of the country that number is 30 percent. On October 12, the Ministry of Health said the situation was worst in Orenburg, Bashkortostan, and Tatarstan, which are east of Moscow and north of the border with Kazakhstan, respectively.

Other areas are also being extremely hard hit. The republic of Mari El declared that it has no more hospital beds for COVID-19 patients, as did the city of Chelyabinsk. Hospitals in the Komi republic are 90 percent full, and in Vologda oblast 97 percent.

In Voronezh, a local chemical plant has suspended its tests of jet rockets in order to furnish the region's hospitals with oxygen. It delivered 42 tons of the life-saving resource to medical facilities last week alone. Still, more supplies are being shipped into the region.

Three hundred and ten doctors and 800 medical personnel have been dispatched to Adiga, and another 780 hospital beds brought online. But health officials are warning that even this may not be enough to handle the surge.

According to the head of Russia's consumer protection agency, 605 schools in 25 regions and 117 childcare facilities in 22 regions are shuttered due to outbreaks. It is clear, however, when one reads local news outlets that these numbers are much higher.

The latest spike in cases and deaths followed by two weeks the nationwide reopening of schools in early September. The country does not report child COVID deaths, intentionally hiding the toll on the young.

Denis Protsenko, the head of Moscow's central infectious disease hospital, Kommunarka, said on Tuesday that the surge is the anticipated outcome of the restart of the school year, with kids contracting the virus and bringing it home to adults in their households. He also added that his facility is filling with patients and its ICU is stretched.

With both the federal government and regional authorities unwilling to impose a lockdown, officials in hard hit areas are imposing rules requiring proof of vaccination, prior infection, or a negative COVID-19 test in order to enter everything from cafes to museums to stores to educational institutions.

In some areas, such as Saint Petersburg, they have set target vaccination rates for certain sectors of the workforce—public employees, service workers, educators, and those working in critical industries. Others regions currently being swamped by the virus—such as Sverdlovsk, Karelia, Novosibirsk—are taking similar measures. However in Russia's two largest cities, Saint Petersburg and Moscow, coronavirus restrictions are essentially non-existent and

mask mandates are poorly enforced, if at all.

The patchwork of limited efforts that vary from one place to the next cannot stem the tide of the spreading Delta variant, which can rip through even highly-vaccinated populations unless other essential public health measures are imposed. In Russia, just 29 percent of the population has received the two shots necessary to be considered fully vaccinated, despite the fact that supplies are abundant there. A total of only 33 percent have gotten at least one shot, a sign that the rate of those initiating vaccination remains very low.

Nonetheless, the Kremlin has made clear that it will do nothing else. On Tuesday, speaking to deputies of the Russian Duma, President Vladimir Putin made a pathetic appeal to the country's parliamentary representatives to speak on mass media in support of vaccination. "People believe you and listen to your advice and recommendations." The country's extremely low vaccination rate demonstrates the preposterousness of this claim.

Lockdowns, along with other stringent measures, are absolutely essential in order to contain and eradicate the virus. But just as this approach has been abandoned in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere around the globe, so too has it been ruled out by the Russian ruling class. Elites everywhere view it as an intolerable limit on profit-making, both in terms of the extraction of surplus value from the working class and the cost of sustaining the population through the economic impact of the closure of all but essential workplaces.

Writing in response to an article in The Penza Post about the region's appeal by its health minister for people to stay home and away from social areas with concentrations of people, one reader replied, "And is work a social area? And is the bus a social area? If everything is so bad, then close enterprises, pay people money, and then they will stay home."



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