

COVID-19 cases, deaths surge in Russia as thousands of children show “acute” symptoms

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As daily cases and deaths in Russia surge to 36,446 and 1,106 respectively, the Russian health minister Mikhail Murashko revealed on Tuesday that almost 60,000 children are currently getting treatment for COVID-19. Out of these, half show “acute” symptoms. Overall, there are now over 268,000 patients with active infections, and nearly 90 percent of hospital beds are filled. Murashko called the load on the health care system “colossal.”

Without providing detailed numbers, one of the chief medical experts of the health ministry, Vladimir Chulanov, earlier stated that the number of hospitalized children has increased several fold over the past year.

As of last week, over 600 children were hospitalized in Moscow alone. A doctor at the city hospital No. 52, Mariyana Lysenko, declared on Monday that, overall, close to 80 percent of patients in their hospital are in severe condition, and that they now had to create additional beds for children, who were being admitted at a rapidly growing rate. One hospital in St. Petersburg reported earlier this month that it was admitting an average of 85 infected children every single day. On average, only one out of four of those admitted was in a condition to be discharged that same day.

Consequences from the disease can be severe even for many children who initially suffer a relatively mild course of the disease. Virologist Evgeny Timakov told the radio station Vesti FM on Monday that about 13 percent, that is more than every eighth child in Russia that has been infected, suffers from Long COVID. Even before the Kremlin reopened schools in September, the health minister acknowledged that half a million children had been infected with COVID-19 over the preceding year and a half.

Horrorific numbers about child infections have also been revealed in neighboring Ukraine, another center of

the new surge. According to the country’s health ministry, over 154,000 children have been infected with the virus during the pandemic, with almost 29,000 currently ill and hundreds hospitalized. Forty-two children have died from COVID-19.

Against this background, the “workfree week” that Russian President Vladimir Putin announced last week for October 30-November 7 will do far too little, far too late. In the Moscow region, the “workfree week” will start on Thursday, and in many other regions, including the second largest city, St. Petersburg, it will start on Saturday. Only a couple regions have imposed it earlier this week.

The “workfree week” does not oblige but only encourages businesses to close while paying their employees full salaries. With only one day remaining before Moscow is set to go into a partial lockdown, many businesses have still not announced to their workers whether or not they will close. Many of the country’s biggest companies that are owned by the state are exempt from the recommendation altogether.

As has been the case throughout the pandemic, the situation is chaotic, with regulations differing not only from region to region but also from company to company. Only a small minority of businesses are enforcing mask mandates, with authorities not even enforcing a mask mandate in Russia’s largest public transportation system in Moscow.

Sports events have not been cancelled, and in many places, big cultural events continue to take place. In the Siberian Sverdlovsk region, authorities are allowing a major music festival to go ahead this week, amidst what one medical worker described as a “catastrophic situation” in the hospitals.

Moreover, there are no travel restrictions for Russians in place. Newspapers report that many have booked

vacations to the Black Sea or Egypt for next week, creating the conditions for a horrific further spread, not just in Russia but internationally.

The Kremlin is trying to encourage people to get vaccinated, without imposing mandates, including through the promise of two paid days off upon vaccination. However, while the vaccinations rose significantly last week amidst the massive surge, still well below 40 percent of the overall population are fully vaccinated. Out of these, about 10 percent are now advised to get booster shots as they received their first shot six months ago or more.

On Tuesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin recommended authorities to order those who are over 60 and not vaccinated to stay at home. A similar mandate has taken effect in Moscow on Monday.

Even as most medical experts do not expect the peak in cases to come before November or early December, the health care system is already cracking in many regions. Indicating the scale of the disaster, the director of the Nurses Association, Valeri Samoilenko, said, “I don’t think I can recall such a test for the health care system, even during World War II.” The Soviet Union lost 27 million people to the struggle against Nazi Germany during the war.

In Orlov, one of the hardest hit regions, the main COVID hospital, which had been designed to care for 670 people, was occupied by almost 740 last week. Medical workers have had to send people away if there are no spots left in hospitals, and doctors are working all week long without a single day off.

The situation in the republic of Bashkiria is also particularly severe. A doctor who was fired in March after he had severely criticized how the health care system had responded to the pandemic, Gleb Glebov, told the liberal TV channel *Dozhd*’, “We have reached the highest peak in infections, but what is happening now has nothing to do with medicine. We lack medication, we lack personnel, 98 percent of hospital beds are occupied, even though they built two hospitals for COVID [in the Orlov region] since the beginning of the pandemic.”

The health minister of the Perm region declared on October 22 that new hospital beds would have to be created, “including in the hallways,” because “the number of sick is just incredible.” Ambulances are so overwhelmed that it can take them an entire night to

attend to calls. One doctor from the Perm region told *Dozhd*’, “We sometimes get patients in the early morning. We are asking them: Why are you coming at 6 AM? They answer that they had called the ambulance already at 9 PM.”

The unfolding disaster is a deadly consequence of the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracy 30 years ago, the culmination of its decades-long betrayal of the October Revolution of 1917. The social “scorched earth policy” of capitalist restoration has devastated the Soviet health care system, which was once one of the best in the world. Hospital beds were decimated, and the combination of extremely poor working conditions and very low salaries has led to a sharp shortage in medical personnel. As internationally, during the pandemic thousands of health care workers have died—by the middle of this year, at least 1,100 Russian medical workers had died from COVID—and many more have left out of physical and mental exhaustion.

The criminal oligarchy that has ruled the country over the past 30 years is completely indifferent to the mass suffering and death and, like its peers around the world, has used the pandemic to further enrich itself. Its disastrous mishandling of the pandemic has created conditions where, much like in the UK and Brazil, the virus can run rampant and mutate, threatening the development of even more dangerous and infectious variants.

In Moscow, three cases of the new mutation of the Delta variant called AY.4. were already reported early this week. The mutation was first detected in Britain, where it is rapidly displacing the earlier Delta variant, and has accounted for 62.4 percent of sequenced COVID-19 cases in the last 28 days.



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