

Russia identifies two cases of South African COVID variant



Since the start of the pandemic, Russia has reported more than four million COVID-19 cases and more than 90,000 deaths. (Photo: Shamil Zhumatov/Reuters)

Moscow, March 17 (RHC)-- Russia has identified two cases of the new variant of the coronavirus first detected in South Africa, its health regulator said in a statement on Tuesday. The variant was first identified in South Africa in December, where it now predominates. It has also been detected now in more than 40 countries, according to the World Health Organization.

South African scientists say there is no clear evidence that the variant is associated with more severe disease or worse outcomes. However, it does appear to spread faster than previous iterations. Russia's Rospotrebnadzor said it had conducted 8,159 tests for mutations of the coronavirus so far.

It is collecting and testing samples from a range of different people, the regulator said, including those who have recently travelled abroad, as well as people who are suspected to have been infected with coronavirus for a second time.

It said it had also found 28 cases of the coronavirus variant first detected in the United Kingdom. It reported the first case of that strain in January. President Vladimir Putin last month ordered a review to determine the effectiveness of Russian-produced vaccines against new variants spreading in different parts of the world. Putin said he wanted the results by March 15th.

A Russian trial testing the effectiveness of revaccination with the Sputnik V shot to protect against new mutations of the coronavirus is producing strong results, researchers had said in February. Since the start of the pandemic, Russia has reported more than four million COVID-19 cases and nearly 90,000 deaths.

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