

Moscow partially shuts down as Russia sees record COVID cases

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Only 32 percent of Russia's population has been fully vaccinated [Yuri Kadobnov/AFP]

Moscow, October 28 (RHC)-- Russia has reported record numbers of daily COVID-19 cases and deaths as Moscow shut down non-essential services for 11 days to fight the surge in infections.

The country hardest-hit in Europe by the pandemic, Russia has struggled with low vaccination rates despite developing several of its own jabs. Recent weeks have seen daily numbers of cases and deaths hit the highest of the pandemic, with the official government tally on Thursday reporting new records of 40,096 infections and 1,159 fatalities in the past 24 hours.

Authorities have shied away from the kind of severe lockdowns imposed in many countries, but have shut down all non-essential services in the capital, Moscow, from Thursday until November 7th.

Retail outlets, restaurants, and sporting and entertainment venues are all closed, along with schools and kindergartens. Only shops selling food, medicine and other essentials are allowed to remain open.

President Vladimir Putin's government has been pinning its hopes on homegrown vaccines like the Sputnik V jab, but Russians have proven stubbornly resistant to being inoculated. As of Thursday, only 32 percent of Russia's population had been fully vaccinated, according to the Gogov website, which tallies COVID-19 data.

Putin last week ordered a nationwide paid holiday between October 30 and November 7 in a bid to reverse rising infections, and Moscow authorities followed suit by ordering the shutdown of non-essential services in the capital from Thursday.

Roads in Moscow on Thursday morning were slightly less congested than usual, but the city's sprawling Metro network was as busy as ever, with many passengers not wearing masks. Authorities have not required Russians to stay at home during the non-working period and many were planning to use the days to travel across the country and abroad.

The mayor of the Black Sea resort city of Sochi has warned of a huge influx of tourists, and demand in Russia for flights bound for Turkey and Egypt has soared. Russia has recorded totals of nearly 8.4 million cases and more than 235,000 deaths, though independent experts say authorities have downplayed the severity of the pandemic.

Figures published by statistics agency Rosstat in October suggest that more than 400,000 people have died in the country from the coronavirus. After a severe months-long lockdown early in the pandemic, Russian authorities have been hesitant to impose further restrictions that would hurt the economy, instead urging Russians to get vaccinated.

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