

Russia sets another monthly record for virus-linked death

MOSCOW (AP) — More than 87,500 people with COVID-19 died in Russia in November, the highest monthly tally since the start of the pandemic, the state statistics agency reported Thursday.

A report by Rosstat brought the overall number of virus-linked deaths between April 2020 and October 2021 to nearly 626,000 — more than twice the widely-cited toll reported by Russia's state coronavirus task force to date. Rosstat uses broader criteria in its tallying system compared to the task force.

According to the Rosstat report, 71,187 deaths were caused directly by confirmed COVID-19, 8,939 deaths were likely caused by the virus but it wasn't confirmed by a test, in 1,477 cases the virus significantly exacerbated fatal complications of other diseases and 5,924 people tested positive for the virus but died of other causes.

The surge came amid low vaccination rates and poor compliance with coronavirus restrictions. Just 51% of Russia's nearly 146 million people have been fully vaccinated, even though the country approved a domestically developed COVID-19 vaccine — Sputnik V — months before most of the world.

Russia in recent months has faced a tide of contagion with record numbers of infections and deaths. The situation has improved over the past few weeks, but the authorities are now bracing up for a new wave of infection caused by the omicron variant.

Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova, who heads the state coronavirus task force, said Thursday that Russia's overall mortality grew by 17% in November over year, a growth she said was due to COVID-19.

Russia on Friday reported 21,073 new cases and 926 deaths. The coronavirus task force has reported a total of nearly 10.5 million confirmed infections and 307,948 deaths in the pandemic — the number more than twice lower than that reported by the state statistics agency.

Russian officials have ascribed the differences in reporting death tallies to the fact that the task force only includes deaths for which COVID-19 was the main cause, and uses data from medical facilities. Rosstat uses broader criteria for counting virus-related deaths and takes its numbers from civil registry offices where registering a death is finalized.

Russia's population shrank by about 945,100 in January-November and the decline could top 1 million this year.

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