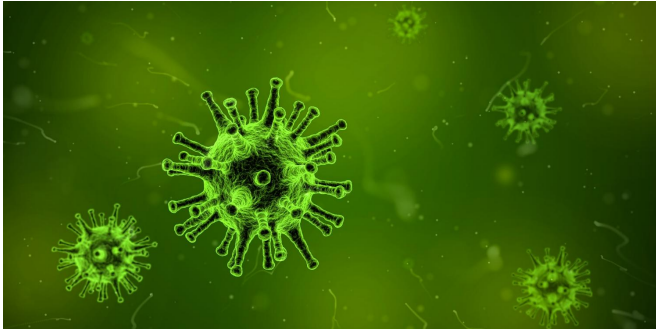


Russia's virus spread stabilising: top health official

17 May 2020



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The growth of new coronavirus cases in Russia is stabilising, a top health official said Sunday as the daily tally fell under 10,000 for the third time this week.

The country has the world's second highest [number](#) of infections at 281,752, topped only by the United States.

On Sunday, it announced new cases had dropped below 10,000 for the third day this week at 9,709.

"We've moved towards the level of stability that we've all been waiting for," said the head of Russia's public health watchdog, Anna Popova, in a televised interview.

"I would say that of today, we have halted the growth" in numbers of cases, Popova said on Rossiya-1 television.

"For the last 10 or 11 days now, we haven't seen additional growth or it's been very small."

"Stabilisation can be seen over the whole country. All the regions have managed to stabilise the situation," she said.

The state watchdog Rospotrebnadzor announces daily [virus](#) numbers and is working to develop a viable vaccine within months at its Vector virus research centre in Siberia.

Popova said it was too early to say if Russians can make plans for summer travel, saying "we need to look at the next two or three weeks".

Russia on Saturday announced the highest daily [death](#) rate at 119, while it has confirmed a total of 2,631 deaths, 10 times fewer than Britain, France, Italy and Spain.

Critics have cast doubt on Russia's low official mortality rate, accusing authorities of under-reporting deaths in order to play down the scale of the crisis.

Russian health officials say one of the reasons the count is lower is that only deaths directly caused by the virus are being included.

Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova denied any manipulation of numbers on Sunday, saying hospitals had a financial interest in identifying [coronavirus](#) cases since they get allocated more money to treat such patients.

"From the economic point of view, any hospital should have an interest in diagnosing more "COVID cases," she said in televised comments.

Authorities say that since the virus came later to Russia, the country had more time to prepare hospital beds and launch wide-scale testing to slow its spread.

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