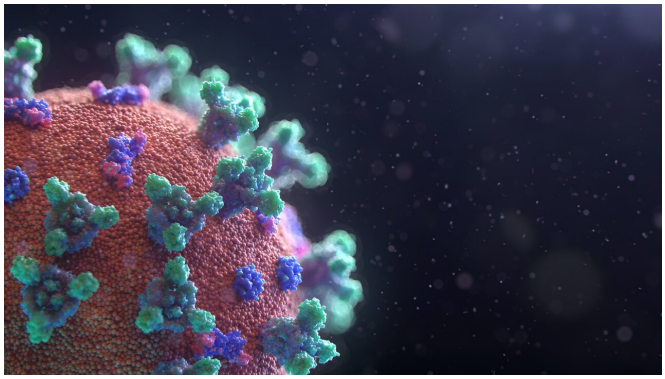
Ukraine virus cases top one million

24 December 2020



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Ukraine's coronavirus caseload passed the one million mark on Thursday as the post-Soviet country's underfunded healthcare system struggles to contain a pre-holiday surge in infections.

The health ministry on recorded 11,490 new virus cases, bringing the total to 1,001,132.

Health officials in the country of around 40 million people have recorded 17,395 deaths since the start of the outbreak.

The government earlier announced a two-week lockdown in January following the winter holidays, during which schools and non-essential businesses will be shuttered.

It also said it hopes to vaccinate "at least 50 percent of the population" against the virus over the course of the next two years.

One of the poorest countries in Europe, Ukraine has not yet signed a deal for the purchase of a foreign vaccine.

Health Minister Maksym Stepanov said Thursday the government "strongly hopes" to sign contracts by the end of the year and begin vaccinations in February.

Ukraine also plans to receive 8 million doses of the vaccine next spring as part of the World Health Organization (WHO) Covax vaccine programme aimed at making coronavirus jabs available to the world's poorest countries.

The government is negotiating a possible increase to 16 million doses, Stepanov said.

As coronavirus cases continue to surge, Ukraine faces a shortage of hospital beds and medical staff.

Several NGOs have also reported a lack of oxygen supplies for critically ill patients.

They also accused the government of failing to prepare the country for the second wave of the pandemic this fall and instead allocating COVID-19 funds towards rebuilding roads.

Earlier this month, anti-lockdown protesters clashed with police in the capital Kiev, leaving around 40 police officers injured.

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