

POSTS SPREAD UNFOUNDED CLAIMS ABOUT RUSSIA'S USE OF COVID-19 VACCINES

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SciCheck Digest Russia developed a COVID-19 vaccine, Sputnik V, in 2020. President Vladimir Putin has...

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SciCheck Digest

Russia developed a COVID-19 vaccine, Sputnik V, in 2020. President Vladimir Putin has said he received three doses of the vaccine, and the government continues to urge Russians to get vaccinated against the disease. But social media posts falsely claimed Putin “ordered the destruction of all” COVID-19 vaccine stockpiles in Russia.

Full Story

Russia was [quick to develop](#) its own COVID-19 vaccine — named [Sputnik V](#) — and begin administering first doses to Russians in late 2020.

Russia then used Sputnik V as a tool of diplomacy, signing agreements to distribute [700 million doses globally](#). The Kremlin and the Russian Direct Investment Fund charged with promoting the vaccines decided to pursue [commercial deals](#) for the vaccine with 69 countries to use Sputnik V instead of the larger [COVAX distribution program](#) created by the World Health Organization.

But Russia ran into numerous setbacks both domestically and globally. Russian citizens had a [deep distrust](#) of Sputnik V, prolonging the rollout of the vaccine, along with larger [cultural anti-vaccine sentiment](#). Globally, [Russia struggled to keep its promise](#) of distributing 700 million vaccination doses, exporting only 108 million doses, as of June.



Russian President Vladimir Putin endorsed the Sputnik V vaccine. “I know it has proven efficient and forms a stable immunity,” [he said in August 2020](#),

[Addressing the State Duma](#), Russia's lower house of the Federal Assembly, in October 2021, Putin said, “You know that the number of infections is growing in many regions and medical specialists are working in difficult conditions. We all know well that the vaccination can save us from the virus and from a severe course of the disease. It is necessary to step up the vaccination pace.”

Because of low vaccination rates, numerous Russia regions [introduced mandatory](#) vaccinations in 2021 for some public sector workers and [people over 60 years old](#).

[Putin said in November 2021](#) that he had received three Sputnik V doses, plus an experimental nasal spray, in hopes of increasing vaccination rates in the country.

Currently, nearly 55% of the Russian population is [fully vaccinated](#), with 61% receiving [at least one dose](#).

Despite the efforts to encourage vaccination in Russia, a March 4 [article in Real Raw News](#) falsely claimed that Putin had “ordered the destruction of all Covid-19 vaccine stockpiles on Russian soil.” The article falsely claimed that the order was based on a “connection” between the vaccine and a “sudden surge” of HIV infections.

Real Raw News [has a disclaimer on its “about us” page](#) stating, “This website contains humor, parody, and satire.” But there is no such disclaimer on the online article.

[There is no evidence](#) that any COVID-19 vaccine or the virus itself has caused HIV, as [we've previously written](#). Russia does have a rising HIV infection rate, but that is part of a [larger five-year trend](#) unrelated to COVID-19 vaccinations.

An [Instagram post](#) made similar claims, while also referring to the [strangulation of a Russian scientist](#) and co-creator of Sputnik V, Andrey Botikov. The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation [looking into Botikov's death](#) reportedly said it had a suspect in custody.

There is no evidence to suggest that Putin ordered the destruction of COVID-19 vaccine stockpiles. To the contrary, the Russian Ministry of Health [said on Telegram on March 5](#) that it had replenished supplies of Sputnik V following shortages.

The health ministry's post, which appeared a day after publication of the Real Raw News article, also touted Sputnik V as effective against severe COVID-19 and death, especially for those over the age of 60.

[According to the Associated Press](#), the Russian health ministry said, “Batches of the Sputnik V vaccine have been distributed by the Ministry of Health and have already been sent by the supplier to the city of Moscow and a number of other regions that have reported a decrease in vaccine stockpiles.”

In a March 13 email to FactCheck.org, [Xenia Cherkaev](#), a postdoctoral fellow in social anthropology at the Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg, told us that there were numerous articles in Russian media about the recent resupplies of COVID-19 vaccines.

Cherkaev said she found no mention of a demand to destroy vaccines.

On the question of vaccine hesitancy among Russians, “People are still urged to be vaccinated,

COVID is still recognized to be a problem (although it pales now, against the background of the so-called 'special military operation')," Cherkaev said, referring to the war in Ukraine.

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If you have a question about COVID-19, email Ask SciCheck, a project of FactCheck.org, at AskSciCheck@FactCheck.org. Tell them you are a reader of the Houston Forward Times. You can read previous Ask SciCheck answers [here](#).

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