

# Top Military Doctor Fired After Pneumonia Deaths

By [The Moscow Times](#)

January 14, 2013

**The**  **Moscow Times**

The Investigative Committee opened a criminal investigation Monday into the deaths from pneumonia of four conscripts in the Moscow region earlier this year.

The announcement followed shortly after the Defense Ministry said that its acting chief doctor, Vyacheslav Novikov, had been fired by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Novikov was dismissed for the "insufficient pace of work ... in a whole range of areas, [including] the maintenance of soldiers' health," according to a statement on the Defense Ministry's website.

The four men who died over the New Year's holiday were based in Podolsk, south of Moscow, and were less than two months into their compulsory military service.

Yevgeny Tulenev, Zakir Kuchekayev, Sergei Shvedov and Dmitry Sokolov fell ill between Dec.

16 and Dec. 19 with symptoms of a common cold, the Investigative Committee said in a statement on its website. They died in the hospital between Dec. 26 and Jan. 7.

The soldiers were from different units and had been conscripted from different parts of the country, Interfax reported. Another soldier died of pneumonia in Yekaterinburg in early January.

The deaths were part of a minor pneumonia outbreak among military personnel in the Moscow region, which officials said had been stamped out by Jan. 11.

Addressing another aspect of conscripts' health on Monday, Shoigu said he supports the scrapping of the footwraps worn by Russian soldiers instead of socks.

The footwraps, or portyaniki, require special lessons to be able to wind correctly around the feet and avoid debilitating sores. They were first worn by soldiers in the Tsarist army during the 19th century.

Shoigu, who was appointed Defense Minister in November, told a military conference that by the end of the year the army "should have forgotten" the word portyaniki, RIA-Novosti reported.

Russia, which has about 1 million people serving in the armed forces, is one of the few countries in the world to still use footwraps. Most other large armies switched to socks in the mid-20th century.

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