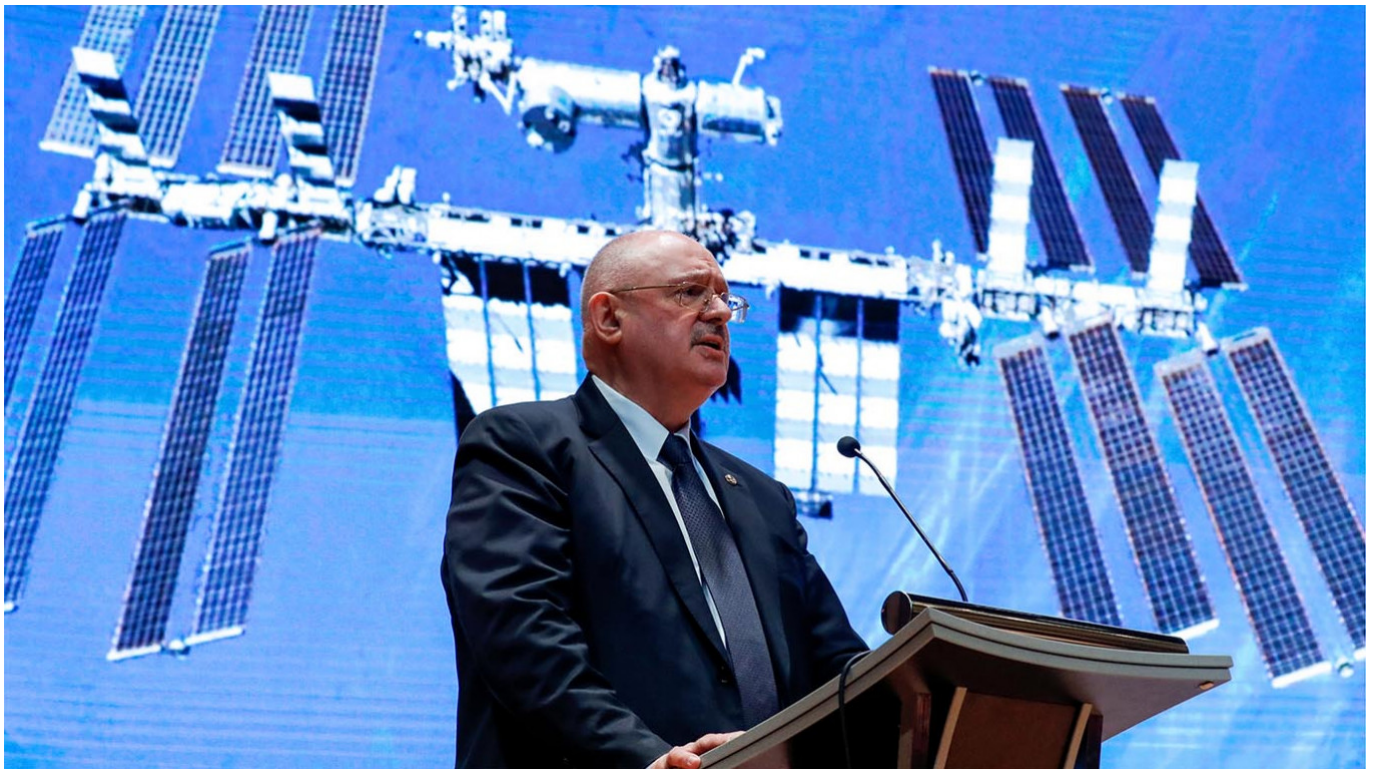


Russia's Spaceflight Chief With Coronavirus Dies After Sending Off Astronauts

May 07, 2020



Yevgeny Mikrin's coronavirus infection was reportedly asymptomatic. **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS**

The head of Russia's human spaceflight program who contracted the coronavirus has died at age 65, the national space agency Roscosmos [announced](#) Tuesday.

Yevgeny Mikrin, designer general of the Energia aerospace and defense corporation, died weeks after attending the April 9 [launch](#) of a three-man crew aboard a Russian capsule to the International Space Station (ISS). Mikrin's coronavirus infection was asymptomatic, the state-run TASS news agency [reported](#) in mid-April.

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"The best doctors fought for his life for several weeks," Roscosmos chief Dmitry Rogozin said in a statement announcing Mikrin's death.

“Unfortunately the illness gained the upper hand,” Rogozin said without specifying the cause of Mikrin’s death.

Russia frequently records different causes of death, including double pneumonia, for patients who test positive for Covid-19. Russia has the lowest official coronavirus death count among the 10 countries with the most cases.

President Vladimir Putin [said](#) Mikrin had made an “invaluable” contribution to Russia’s national space program.

Rogozin has previously [said](#) that the ISS crew is coronavirus-free because the incubation period for the virus had passed, echoing NASA’s [confidence](#) in the astronauts’ pre-launch quarantine.

At least 173 Russian space industry employees have contracted Covid-19 and six have died as of April 30, before Mikrin’s death, Rogozin [said](#).

Anatoly Ivanishin and Ivan Vagner of Roscosmos and NASA's Chris Cassidy were the first new crew members to reach the ISS after the pandemic began. A week later, two astronauts and one cosmonaut [returned](#) to Earth for the first time since the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a global pandemic.

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