

Moscow Restaurants Struggle to Stay Afloat Under New Virus Restrictions

All of the city's eateries now require customers to present QR codes proving they have been vaccinated, negative PCR tests or proof of recovery from Covid-19.

By [Uliana Pavlova](#)

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People without QR codes can only sit on terraces. **Viacheslav Prokofiev / TASS**

Tilda Food & Bar, a tiny gastropub in central Moscow that's usually bursting at the seams, has been empty almost every day this week since the Russian capital introduced strict new rules for diners in an attempt to halt the spread of the highly infectious Delta variant of the coronavirus.

"Usually at this time we have a full house," manager Margarita Dubrovskaya told The Moscow Times on Thursday at lunchtime as she surveyed tables and chairs devoid of customers.

From June 28, all Moscow restaurants and cafes have required visitors to present QR codes proving they have been vaccinated, negative PCR tests taken within the past 72 hours or proof of recent recovery from Covid-19.

In a city with just 16% of residents vaccinated, the new requirements are a disaster for the hospitality industry. While people without QR codes can still sit on terraces until July 12, many restaurants, including Tilda, have limited options for outdoor seating.

The problem is being exacerbated by glitches in the system, with foreigners living in the capital who have been vaccinated with Sputnik V or recovered from the virus reporting difficulty obtaining their QR codes through Moscow's government portal website.

Russia on Friday said it would not impose a new lockdown despite reporting a record number of coronavirus deaths for the fourth day in a row.

Outside Tilda, Dubrovskaya greeted guests and seated them at her only pavement table.

“We had a bunch of regulars come yesterday and sit outside, some were just standing and drinking,” she said.

Tinkoff Bank [estimates](#) that restaurant revenues fell by at least 50% on the first day of the introduction of the rules, according to the RBC news website.

Some Moscow restaurants are ignoring the new requirements and continuing to serve customers as usual.

Lilit Ambartsumyan, 31, is general director of the Shu-Shu Georgian restaurant and bar in Moscow, which is welcoming all customers regardless of their QR-code status.

“The government’s requirements are complete nonsense and we are not going to discriminate between vaccinated and unvaccinated customers,” Ambartsumya told Moscow Times.

Shu-Shu has already received its first fine after officials in civilian clothing visited when they saw an Instagram post announcing the restaurant would be breaking the rules. Fines range from 100,000 (\$1,363) to 500,000 rubles.

Ambartsumyan remains undeterred.

“We and 11 other restaurateurs are in the process of filing a petition to the Moscow authorities because something needs to change otherwise our businesses will die,” she said.

Despite the decision to stay open to all customers, Ambartsumyan said Shu-Shu has still suffered losses.

“We have lost about 70% of our revenue just this week,” Ambartsumyan said.

Tatiana Yatskova, owner of the *Pravilnoye Prostranstvo* (Right Space) coffee shop, is also refusing to follow Sobyenin’s QR code requirements.

“I'm not afraid of being fined. I will appeal to them. It's illegal to fine us,” Yatskova said.

On the coffee shop's Instagram page, Yatskova called the new laws "fascist."

"Maybe there are other restaurant owners who want to join us, but they are afraid. Do not hesitate, join us!" Yatskova said.

When Moscow went into strict lockdown in April 2020, many restaurants were forced to close or switch to delivery only with limited staff.

"That's how it started last year, at first there were less people and then the next thing you know we had to close because delivery wasn't enough to justify the costs for us," said Tilda's Dubrovskaya.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin has introduced a rescue package to help Moscow restaurants cover the losses, including subsidies for small and medium-sized businesses and allowing restaurants leasing premises from the government to defer rent.

However, restaurant managers say the measures are mostly symbolic.

"We cannot defer rent because only a small percentage of restaurants actually rent from the city, most of us are left to fend for ourselves," Ambartsumyan said.

Dubrovskaya said she had tried and failed to apply for subsidies during lockdown.

"We had to collect a lot of documents and still didn't get anything so we're not counting on any government support," she said.

Jake Cordell and Spencer Michaels contributed reporting.

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