

To Access Meds, Russian Prisoners With HIV Join War Against Ukraine

Russian soldiers with HIV and hepatitis C must wear colored bracelets identifying their status; about 20% of prisoner recruits have HIV.

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Would you prefer a quick or slow death? Many incarcerated Russians living with HIV feel that's the choice they face when deciding whether to remain in prison or serve in Russia's war against Ukraine, [reports The New York Times](#).

Incarcerated Russians with [HIV](#) say they don't have access to lifesaving treatment—or at least to meds they think actually work, which means they'd eventually die of AIDS-related illness in [prison](#), or a “slow death.” Conversely, if they volunteer to serve in the war in exchange for a pardon and effective HIV meds, they'd likely meet a “sudden death” on the battlefield, as one soldier explained it. Such volunteers are often ordered to engage in risky combat with little training.

About 10% of Russia's prison population is HIV positive, according to New York Times reporting. [Hepatitis C](#) and tuberculosis are also prevalent among the incarcerated. About 50,000 [prisoners](#) have volunteered for the Russian forces since last summer, accounting for about 10% of the country's incarcerated population.

[Ukrainian](#) military experts have reported capturing Russian soldiers living with HIV and hepatitis C. Such soldiers are easily identified by the color-coded wristbands they're made to wear (white for hepatitis C, red for HIV) to alert fellow soldiers of their status in the event that they are wounded and pose a potential health risk.

[Russia](#) invaded Ukraine in February 2022, with Russian President Vladimir Putin recruiting hundreds of thousands of male citizens against their will. [According to previous reporting](#), to avoid the draft, citizens have resorted to breaking their own limbs and purchasing fake diagnoses for HIV and hepatitis C, though now it seems a diagnosis wouldn't necessarily disqualify one from service.

In the United States, people living with HIV and hepatitis C are not allowed to enlist in the military; last fall, some members of [Congress pressured the Biden administration and the Department of Defense to allow those with HIV and hep C to serve](#). In addition, a federal judge last spring struck down Pentagon policies that discharged and denied promotions to service members who contracted HIV. For more on that, see [“‘Landmark Victory’ Court Ruling for Service Members Living](#)

[With HIV.”](#)

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