France seeks to protect hospitals after series of cyberattacks

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The French government announced a "vast training programme" on Wednesday to help hospital staff guard against hackers after a series of cyberattacks against medical facilities.

"The target is that 100 percent of the most important health facilities have undergone these new exercises by May 2023," the interior, health and digital services ministers announced in a joint statement.

Further effort will be made to spread best-practice throughout French hospitals in "the reactions and practices to adopt in case of a cyber event," the statement added.

The announcement reflects mounting concern in France about repeated attacks on hospitals that see cyber criminals lock down a facility's critical IT networks and data before demanding a ransom to release them.

In a case earlier this month, hackers infiltrated a major public hospital in Versailles outside of Paris, meaning the emergency ward had to operate at around 50 percent capacity and the maternity unit at a third.

Another hospital south of Paris, in the Corbeil-Essonnes suburb, was targeted in August with the same Lockbit ransomware.

Public hospitals are unable to pay ransoms under the law which makes such payments illegal.

In February last year, as alarm grew about the vulnerability of the health system, President Emmanuel Macron announced an extra billion euros for cybersecurity in the health sector.

He called a spate of attacks at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic a "crisis within a crisis".

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