

# As pandemic continues in China, lack of resources provokes social media protests

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January 23 was the first anniversary of the Chinese government's lockdown of the city of Wuhan, which eventually contained the first major outbreak of COVID-19. A year later, however, the pandemic is raging worldwide, and re-emerging in China.

With the arrival of the coldest period of winter, infections are growing rapidly. On January 24, there were 124 new confirmed cases (symptomatic) and 45 new asymptomatic infections in China.

In the past week, more than 100 new cases have been reported almost every day, mostly concentrated in the Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces of northern China.

As of January 26, there were 2,928 confirmed cases (symptomatic) and 956 asymptomatic infections across the country, with seven regions classified as "high-risk" and 72 as "medium-risk."

With the massive movement of people associated with the week-long Spring Festival looming, due to commence on February 12, and the spread of the epidemic across the country, the government's pandemic prevention and control system is facing tremendous pressure and fuelling popular discontent.

Tonghua City, Jilin Province, with a population of about two million, is one of the hardest-hit areas. On January 24, there were 67 new cases in Jilin Province, of which 56 cases were in Tonghua City. As of January 26, there are 202 confirmed cases (with symptoms) in Tonghua City.

The local government announced a lockdown on January 18, blocking traffic and suspending production and business activities. In addition, many areas implemented "seals" controls—many residents had their homes affixed with seals to prohibit entry and exit.

This bureaucratic control measure has caused significant dissatisfaction. Being forcibly locked in their homes and unable to obtain enough food and

medicine, people protested on social media about the lack of resources and support, including the shortage of volunteers that officials relied upon to deliver essential supplies.

A resident commented on social media: "There are only 800 volunteers in Tonghua City, but in fact there may not even be 800. The app for ordering daily necessities cannot be opened, and no one will deliver them three or four days after placing the order. Community calls have been unable to get through..."

"Every house has a seal, garbage is left in the house for more than ten days, chronic patients have no medicine to use, [and must] open the window to ask neighbours to get some insulin. Pregnant women can't eat fruits and vegetables. My brother was trapped in a pet shop without a bed or quilt. He only relies on a box of instant noodles that he forgot to bring home before..."

"All the delivery workers are sealed at home. They have done multiple nucleic acid tests and are not allowed to come out for distribution. Some people want to be volunteers, but the community does not allow them.... It is better to report the real situation... Solving problems blindfolded is really ridiculous."

Another resident posted this message: "At present, as an ordinary resident, the problems I can see are as follows: 1. There are not enough front-line workers and volunteers. Many people do not sleep for several days and nights and can't hold on anymore. High-load work makes many frontline workers and volunteers overwhelmed. 2. There are not enough samples for nucleic acid testing, and no one will do the test after the seal is put on the door. 3. There is no support guaranteed after the seal is put on the door, and no one has delivered materials and handled garbage for many days."

Confronted by residents' protests and dissatisfaction,

Tonghua City punished 14 bureaucrats, including the director of the local health committee, on January 23 for ineffective pandemic prevention and control. On January 24, Jiang Haiyan, the deputy mayor of Tonghua City, publicly apologised at a press conference for food and medicine delivery and other issues.

However, according to many media reports, despite official promises, the problem of resource deliveries has not been resolved. At the same time, a large number of frontline workers and volunteers frequently lack protective equipment.

Such insensitive bureaucratic methods are not confined to Tonghua City, with reports of similar practices in Heilongjiang and Hebei provinces.

Since the lockdown policy was first implemented in Wuhan last year, it has been generally considered to be an effective means of responding to COVID-19 outbreaks. China mostly controlled a large-scale pandemic through strict control measures.

However, problems are being caused by the Beijing regime's rigid social management. Bureaucrats at all levels neglect the needs and opinions of the working class, seriously disrupt lives and violate basic rights, in order to prove their "political performance."

Not only that, but following the economic shock caused by the pandemic, the Chinese government and official media played down the impact of the epidemic during the second half of last year. Despite many small-scale pandemic outbreaks, the government kept its focus on a "Resume Production" campaign. Many articles warned of the risk of a new wave of infections in China, but the government paid no attention.

Now the pandemic shows no signs of remission in China, and the working class faces a bureaucratic response and lack of support, as well as unemployment and wage cuts.



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