

Shanghai under citywide lockdown as COVID-19 cases continue to climb

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“It is an arduous task and huge challenge to combat the Omicron variant while maintaining the normal operation of core functions in a megacity with a population of 25 million,” Chinese Vice Premier Sun Chunlan said over the weekend as she toured Shanghai amid its lockdowns. New cases have been climbing rapidly, necessitating harsh measures to bring the outbreak under swift control.

The outbreak in Shanghai is primarily a byproduct of local authorities having resisted employing more stringent measures earlier, allowing the situation to spiral to its current state.

The visit by Sun, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, served to assure the population that there would be “unswerving adherence to the dynamic Zero-COVID approach and mobilizing COVID-19 testing capacity, medical personnel, and COVID-19 prevention supplies to support Shanghai in the fight against the epidemic.”

It was also intended to quell concerns raised in Chinese social media, which had been gaining international interest about the death of a nurse suffering from an asthma exacerbation who was denied entry into a hospital. Additional concerns being raised are that the lockdowns were being extended beyond what authorities had promised and concerns over access to food and supplies.

However, consistent with President Xi Jinping’s previous concerns over minimizing disruptions to the economic infrastructure, Sun stressed that “key industries and institutions” would operate under a “strict closed-loop management” that could ensure “the normal operation of core functions and the stability of supply and industrial chains.”

A concept borrowed from the Tokyo Summer Olympics in 2021 and applied to the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics meant that some large-scale manufacturers with the ability to house workers in their compounds and act quickly ahead of lockdown orders could continue running their

operations. Reuter reported last week that “GM, which said [last] Monday that its Shanghai joint venture was producing normally, declined to comment on the arrangements at its factory. A spokesperson said the company and its joint ventures had developed and were executing contingency plans with their suppliers to mitigate uncertainty related to COVID-19. SAIC [Chinese state-owned automaker in joint venture with GM] did not have immediate comment.”

Shanghai’s two-phased lockdown was modified into a full-scale lockdown late Thursday night as new cases of COVID-19 were discovered, underscoring the silent uncontrolled community spread that had been underway for several weeks.

The National Health Commission of the People’s Republic of China reported there had been 13,146 confirmed COVID-19 cases on Sunday, of which 11,691 were asymptomatic. In March alone, there were more than 100,000 infections reported.

Yesterday’s numbers make for the highest single-day figure in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. The high number of asymptomatic cases has been attributed to both the character of the Omicron strain and early detection due to mass testing, a fundamental strategy for the Chinese Zero-COVID strategy.

Zhang Boli, an academician from the Chinese Academy of Engineering and head of the Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, explained that the increase in vaccination rates has helped boost population immunity. Health officials have reported that more than 3.27 billion doses of COVID vaccines have been administered.

Yet, those over 80 years of age and the most vulnerable are the least vaccinated in China. And a considerable number of those 60 and older have only received two doses. Like Hong Kong, a policy of allowing the virus to spread with meager mitigation measures would have

deadly consequences.

Wu Zunyou, principal epidemiologist at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), told the *Global Times* about the vast number of asymptomatic cases, “It is the result of our effective epidemic prevention work, namely the early identification of the epidemic, timely response, and the whole process management of all infected people, including the asymptomatic cases...” However, Wu acknowledged epidemic controls will grow more challenging if daily infections continue to rapidly rise above 10,000 in the city.

Resources are currently being mobilized to protect the health system in Shanghai. Health care workers from neighboring provinces are being mobilized to assist in mass testing and the building of makeshift hospitals to manage asymptomatic infections. Additionally, food and necessities are being directed to support the population with volunteers working round the clock.

According to the Shanghai Health Commission, the city launched a citywide COVID-19 antigen self-testing campaign to identify early cases based on a self-reporting system. This will be followed by Monday’s citywide Nucleic Acid testing (PCR). In all, 32.74 million PCR tests have been conducted in the city since March 28, 2022, when the phased lockdown commenced. For this monumental undertaking, a sample collection site has been set up for every 3,000 residents, with the samples reaching testing institutes about once every hour.

However, rather than acknowledging the complex network of operations that have had to be mobilized in short order to ensure that millions are protected from infection and the virus can be suppressed and eliminated, the primary focus of the Western mainstream media is to take advantage of the chaotic nature of these developments and malign these efforts in the realm of public opinion.

In particular, the *New York Times* has chosen to focus on the separation of some children from their parents during the lockdown and mass testing, which was met with an outpouring of anger and frustration on Chinese social media.

They wrote, “In the images [photos and videos], a series of hospital cribs, each holding several young children, appeared to be parked in the hallway of the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Center in the city’s Jinshan District. A video showed several of the children crying.” The health center acknowledged that these images were authentic. And indeed, these are concerning.

However, in the context of the outbreak and its dangers to the population, it is self-serving of the *New York Times* which is using this to discredit the tremendous effort undertaken in the face of the Omicron variant in Shanghai. The same leading press of American liberalism has repeatedly published demands for living with the virus.

Meanwhile 243,000 children in the US have lost a caregiver to COVID-19 over the last two years. Of these, 194,000 lost both parents. As *Scientific American* noted, “The psychological and economic aftershocks can have lifetime negative impacts on their education and career.” Meanwhile, as the BA.2 surge begins to catch steam, more than 700 people are dying from COVID-19 each day in the United States. Almost 1,500 children in the US have been killed throughout the pandemic, two-thirds of them during the last eight months, as a byproduct of the bipartisan policy of ensuring schools would remain open during repeated waves of infection.

Meanwhile, the Chinese CDC has said a new strain of the virus was isolated from a patient with mild COVID-19 symptoms in Suzhou, approximately 43 miles from Shanghai, which has never been sequenced before. According to Bloomberg, it appears to have evolved from the BA.1.1 branch of the Omicron variant.

Despite the stringent measures, the dynamic Zero-COVID strategy remains popular in China. The global experience with COVID-19, particularly in the US, where 1 million people have been killed by COVID-19, has not escaped the population. Dr. Q, a cardiologist in Shenyang, acknowledged that a “live with the virus” scenario in China would lead to the death of well over a million people. “And I would be the first to catch it and bring it to my mother, who is over 70, and I fear what would happen to her.”



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