

Chinese authorities complete COVID testing for Shanghai's population of 25 million in less than one day

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China's *Global Times* reported that Shanghai had accomplished “mission impossible” Monday—the PCR testing of all 25 million-plus people in one day. Placing this figure into context, it is 10 times higher than all the tests conducted in the United States on January 10, 2022, when Omicron was surging across the country.

City officials said that the massive first-of-its-kind public health initiative was completed ahead of schedule at around 7 p.m. Monday. The previous day a city-wide antigen testing was conducted as a prelude to the PCR testing of the population.

On Monday, 13,354 new COVID cases were reported, a significant jump from 9,000 on Sunday. However, these are attributed to the more robust testing that identifies all the sources of infection in China's financial capital. Of these, only 268 were symptomatic. Overall, China's mainland reported 16,590 cases, a single-day high during the current Omicron surge. In Jilin province, the trend of daily cases is on the decline as lockdowns continue.

The two-phased lockdown that began more than a week ago in Shanghai morphed into a city-wide lockdown last Friday when lockdown measures were extended for the east side of the city across the Huangpu River due to the rising number of confirmed COVID cases.

Throughout March, following the explosion of cases in Hong Kong, Chinese health officials documented a growing number of community transmissions throughout most provinces in China. Yet, Shanghai had resisted employing more stringent measures to minimize the impact of the pandemic on the economy until health officials raised concerns about the growing unrecognized spread of infection.

The implementation of the lockdown in Shanghai signaled to the Chinese people and the international financial markets that the Politburo's commitment

remained to “a now-globally unique strategy—fine-tuned across outbreaks from Xi'an to Shenzhen—of attempting to completely eliminate local cases no matter the economic and social costs,” as characterized by the *Financial Times* (FT).

Given recent experiences with the massive surge and deaths in Hong Kong and, in general, with the deadly impact of the virus allowed to take flight across the globe, elimination remains popular with the Chinese population. Yet, it is being met with vicious denunciation in the bourgeois press.

On this issue, the *World Socialist Web Site* recently noted that the *Financial Times*, “Speaking for the city of London, Wall Street and the global financial oligarchy that once controlled Shanghai and aims to establish neocolonial domination over all of China, [the FT Editorial Board] denounces lockdowns and all other public health measures that impinge on the production of profits but have saved millions of lives in China.”

In short, they deem Zero-COVID an untenable prospect and demand that China begin a plan of action to end the elimination strategy and learn “to live with the virus.” Beijing, however, is not presently willing to concede defeat and acquiesce to these stipulations that would see millions of its inhabitants suffer the same deadly consequences.

It would be essential, in that regard, to take a brief account of the pandemic in the US over the last two years.

Over 1 million Americans have officially perished from their infections. However, as *Scientific American* recently noted, “This toll is likely an undercount because more than 200,000 other excess deaths go beyond typical mortality rates, caused in part by lingering effects of the disease and the strain of the pandemic.” COVID has become the third leading cause of death after heart disease

and cancer in the US.

Nyasha Black, director of demographic research at the University of Alabama, speaking with *Scientific American*, said, “We will see the rippling effects of the pandemic on our society and the way it impacts individuals for generations.” Three-quarters of all the dead in the US have been among people 65 years and older, representing a critical part of the intergenerational family structure among the working class. Indeed, one out of every 74 people in this age bracket has been wiped off the face of the earth by a preventable disease.

Nearly one-quarter of all COVID deaths occurred among working-age Americans. As J Scott Davidson, CEO of the insurance company OneAmerica said in December 2021, “We are seeing right now the highest death rates we have ever seen in the history of this business. Death rates are up 40 percent over what they were pre-pandemic,” calling it “a one-in-200-year catastrophe.”

These deaths will have a lasting tragic impact on the lives of the youngest. It has been estimated that over 243,000 children have lost a “caregiver” to COVID, which includes 194,000 who have lost one or both parents.

Jennifer Dowd, a demographer at the University of Oxford, told *Scientific American* that “a lot of us demographers have just been tallying the losses, and it kind of snuck up on us, the scale of it all. We never thought it would keep going like this.” And even still, the long-term consequences on health and mortality have yet to be ascertained. Meanwhile, US politicians are wrangling over a few billion dollars in COVID funding while almost a trillion is to be made available for war-making.

For China, a co-existence strategy would have equally devastating consequences. Those 80 years of age and over, the most vulnerable, are the least vaccinated. And a considerable number of those 60 to 80 have only received two doses. With an immune evading virus and waning immunity, the virus would run like a massive tsunami wave through densely populated megacities across the mainland. The present attempts to bring Omicron under control attest to the difficulties faced by Chinese authorities.

Currently, China remains the only country that has continued to wage a campaign against the virus by mustering all available national resources to extinguish every outbreak through mass testing, tracing primary and secondary contacts, and isolating and treating the

infected—all fundamental cornerstones of pandemic response.

The Chinese authorities mobilized all their national resources to test every person in Shanghai. As Reuters explained, “The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) on Sunday dispatched more than 2,000 medical personnel from across the army, navy and joint logistics support forces to Shanghai ... about 38,000 healthcare workers from provinces such as Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and the capital Beijing have been dispatched to Shanghai, according to state media, which showed them arriving, suitcase-laden and masked up, by high-speed rail and aircraft.”

Many had compared the current initiative to events in Wuhan in February of 2020, when the country faced its last real threat from the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The current testing strategy in Shanghai will inform the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention and health authorities of the public health measures’ effectiveness and direct immediate actions to attempt to eliminate the virus from the city. However, as the FT noted, only three of 31 provinces have reported zero cases. Outside of Shanghai, Jilin, and possibly Hebei provinces, case numbers remain under 100 per day though almost half are seeing a rising trajectory.

The challenge and fundamental weakness of China’s Zero-COVID policy is its national character. The current relentless nature of the outbreaks may very well drive the ruling class of China to be more concerned about its economic standing and insist on the futility of elimination. In collaboration with their international brothers and sisters, the Chinese working class must resist abandoning elimination and demand a globally coordinated action. The fundamental reality remains that there is no national solution to the pandemic, which remains in its acute phase, despite more than two years it has been allowed to run rampant across the globe.



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