

Shanghai lockdown extended indefinitely as COVID-19 cases continue to climb

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Regarding the global COVID-19 pandemic, all eyes have turned towards China, where the lockdown in Shanghai has been extended indefinitely to battle the highly infectious and immune-resistant Omicron BA.2 subvariant that has caused a record surge of infections in the country.

Since mid-March, COVID-19 cases have been continually rising in Shanghai, the financial center of China. On March 28, Shanghai health officials initiated a two-stage lockdown whereby the city east of the Huangpu River would be placed in lockdown for five days, followed by the western half of the city. However, late last Thursday health officials opted to lock down the entire city until cases are brought to zero.

Beijing is mobilizing all its resources to assist Shanghai during an outbreak on the verge of spinning out of control. More than 38,000 medical workers from 15 provincial-level regions have been deployed to assist in infection control, including building makeshift hospitals that can accommodate at least 50,000 patients. On Friday, the city underwent a second round of citywide testing.

Despite concerns about supplies reaching neighborhoods under lockdown and delays in coordinating food deliveries, the situation seems to have improved recently. As Bloomberg confirmed, "Officials have ramped up assistance in recent days, and some residents have begun receiving food packs from the government that include eggs, milk, vegetables, and luncheon meat."

The efforts being employed in Shanghai have been compared to that in Wuhan city in Hubei province, which emerged out of a 79-day lockdown precisely two years ago on April 8, 2020. As happened then, the initial foray into lockdown has been chaotic and complex. Establishing such a vast, previously nonexistent logistics network means delays, setbacks, and social apprehension. However, the commitment to these efforts has been unwavering.

Yesterday, China's National Health Commission (NHC) reported 24,224 new COVID-19 cases (including 91 imported cases), of which 22,648 were asymptomatic. However, the bulk of daily COVID-19 cases continues to be counted in Shanghai, and the city reported 21,222 new cases

yesterday, of which 824 were symptomatic infections.

By comparison, there were only 3,001 COVID-19 cases in the rest of mainland China, with 716 symptomatic cases. Most of these cases continue to be identified in the northeast province of Jilin. There were 2,266 COVID-19 cases, with 2,027 in Changchun, a city of nine million known locally as China's "City of Automobiles" or the "Detroit of China." Lockdowns in Jilin city have drastically reduced new infections, with only 228 reported Friday.

The apparent rise in COVID-19 cases across Shanghai is a product of mass citywide PCR testing to ascertain the location of every infection. In other words, the testing has uncovered the actual extent of the silent community transmission contributing to the rise in infections.

Many in the population who have supported elimination complained that the somewhat laissez-faire approach in Shanghai until late March contributed to the avoidable onerous outbreak. After criticizing the Chinese government's policy, even the *New York Times* had to admit that the support for Zero-COVID remains high in China.

Chen Daoyin, a former assistant professor at the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, told the *Times*, "Beijing had clearly doubled down on Zero-COVID and was bringing Shanghai in line with the rest of the country. In a system like China's, where politics determines everything, it's impossible for you to walk a different road."

In contrast, the US is doubling down on "living with the virus." COVID-19 surveillance systems are being rapidly dismantled, adhering to fascistic former president Trump's infamous quip, "If we didn't do any testing, we would have very few cases." These efforts have had full bipartisan support and approval from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Additionally, the numerous reported infections among high-level Washington politicians, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, mislead Americans to believe that COVID-19 is harmless.

More than one million Americans have needlessly perished from COVID-19, and life expectancy in the US has declined by more than 2.2 years during the pandemic. In

stark contrast, fewer than 5,000 have died in China and life expectancy has now surpassed that of the US.

In contradistinction to the unscientific measures employed in the US and much of the rest of the world, the Chinese authorities have shifted from a mitigation strategy in Shanghai to implementing the strictest standards to eliminate COVID-19 and preserve life and livelihood. The sudden shift and resoluteness have been met with savage attacks in the Western press against the Zero-COVID policy, decrying its impact on the global markets.

On March 29, the Editorial Board of the *Financial Times*, the mouthpiece of finance capital, wrote, “Ultimately, China will need a strategy to exit Zero-COVID-19 and live with the virus ... As the world slowly returns to business as usual, the policy will come at a higher and higher cost to China.”

On April 3, *The Economist* remarked, “The pain will be felt abroad too just as it was amid the lockdowns in Shenzhen, another city deeply entangled in global supply chains ... One team of economists estimates that a one-month lockdown of Shanghai and its spillover effects would knock a staggering four percent off China’s GDP in that period.”

On April 6, the *Washington Post* Editorial Board wrote, “For two years, China’s leadership has bragged to anyone who would listen that its authoritarian system did a better job fighting the pandemic than the undisciplined and chaotic democracies. Pointing to the towering death toll in the United States, Beijing expressed pride that its policy of clamping down mercilessly whenever an infection was discovered, a policy called ‘Zero COVID,’ was working.”

The *Post* added, “For the most part, it did, and China’s population was spared the sacrifices and misery seen elsewhere. But now, China’s dictatorship is on the ropes in its battle with the virus.” Evidently, in this battle the *Post* is rooting for the virus to win.

Bloomberg provocatively opened its April 7 report, “Pets beaten to death. Parents forced to separate from their children. Elderly folks unable to access medical care. Locked up residents chanting ‘we want to eat’ and ‘we want freedom.’” No mention was made of efforts being made to alleviate these concerns, which affect a tiny minority of those under lockdown.

On April 8, the *Wall Street Journal* complained that the lockdowns are strangling manufacturing operations and placing undue strains on “stretched global supply chains.” They wrote, “Stringent government measures to contain the country’s COVID-19 outbreak, the worst in more than two years, are locking down tens of millions of people, mostly in and around the industrial heartland of Shanghai.”

Regarding these fiery statements and rumors being purported about the plight of Shanghai, the WSWS had the opportunity to speak to Dr. Y in Shanghai on condition of

anonymity.

Commenting on the concerns raised in the media about children being separated from their parents, she said, “Yes, that was true and made a lot of people very angry and verbal. COVID-positive children were quarantined at a center away from their negative parents. Positive parents, however, could stay with their children. However, after the outrage, the authorities adjusted their policy and allowed parents to stay with their children.”

Regarding the issue of food and supplies, Dr. Y explained that food distribution was being handled locally by communities. “Locking everyone in their homes and closing all the supermarkets to prevent clustering [of people] obviously creates food shortages. People are forming WeChat groups in their community to bulk order things, and they also try to order groceries and have them delivered through different apps. The success is based mainly on luck.”

She added, “Keep in mind that the cry for lack of food is very loud. However, there are reports that the authorities are going to start to take over the whole city’s food distribution instead of relying on local communities.”

Dr. Y and other healthcare workers in China have corroborated that the elimination strategy had allowed them to return to normal life routines until recently. They all expressed concern about the threat that Omicron poses and supported the current efforts.

Authorities’ recent imposition on freedom of movement stems directly from the dangers posed by allowing the virus free rein in the population without enough immune protection. The let-it-rip policy that international financial markets insist on would be socially catastrophic and politically destabilizing for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) authorities.

The purpose of the Western media’s attack on China’s Zero-COVID policy is to incite anger and reaction among the Chinese population. Utterly indifferent to concerns for the life and well-being of their own population or that of any other country, the ruling elites are weaponizing the virus as an existential threat and a political weapon against the Chinese.



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