

As the death toll in Shanghai climbs, China moves to contain the rise in new COVID infections in Beijing

Benjamin Mateus
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Despite China having checked the spread of COVID-19 infections across Shanghai during the last four weeks of lockdown, the death toll has begun to mount quickly. After 39 deaths on Saturday, the number of new fatalities jumped to 51 on Sunday, according to Chinese health officials. This brings the total to 138 since the resurgence of cases in March.

Because Chinese health officials have been tracking asymptomatic, symptomatic, and those that convert to symptomatic cases separately, the day-to-day analysis conducted by the *World Socialist Web Site* found that over the last several weeks, the share of symptomatic COVID cases has been climbing congruent with the nature of the disease caused by COVID. Unsurprisingly, death as a lagging indicator is beginning to confirm the lethal potential of the latest SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus variant and the critical need to eliminate every discovered outbreak.

The Western press and prominent scientists, like Dr. Michael Osterholm, have insisted that the Chinese official statistics on COVID are fixed because the death tolls are so low. However, the trends captured from tracking the daily official publicly available reports give a clear insight into how the infection spreads—first asymptotically, then escalating to symptomatic disease, followed by severe cases, and finally death. The data is consistent with what is known about the disease and efforts to discredit Chinese figures underscore the deep politicization of the pandemic even among experts in the field to vilify any attempt to eliminate the coronavirus.

Men make up the larger share of the recent deaths in China, with the mean age of death averaging over 80. Many had multiple comorbidities contributing to their deaths from COVID. More than 95 percent of individuals who perished were not vaccinated, highlighting both the

concerns raised by Chinese officials about the low vaccination rates among the oldest in the country and the efficacy of the Chinese vaccines in preventing hospitalizations and deaths.

Overall, cases in the financial and manufacturing hub continue their downward trajectory as Zero-COVID remains the official strategy employed against the virus, with China the only country to adhere to comprehensive pandemic prevention measures. Asymptomatic cases were down to 16,983 from 19,657 a day earlier. The number of confirmed symptomatic infections was up at 2,472 from 1,401 the previous day, of which 846 were conversions to symptomatic illness.

Meanwhile, 20,548 asymptomatic cases were released from medical observation, leaving almost a quarter-million people with asymptomatic cases under observation. There are presently 29,178 patients with the symptomatic disease (12.4 percent of COVID cases) in hospitals being treated, of whom 274 are in serious condition. The figure in the severe category has increased by 38.

Over 360 medical experts specializing in managing complex health issues have been mobilized to eight city-level COVID-19-designated hospitals to assist in treating complex cases. A third of the patients admitted to these hospitals are over 70, suffering from various cardiac, kidney, pulmonary or liver conditions.

“People in advanced ages are the most vulnerable to coronavirus due to low immunity and weak physical conditions,” Zhao Dandan, deputy director of the Shanghai Health Commission, explained to SHINE, the *Shanghai Daily*’s digital news outlet.

Efforts by Chinese authorities to stem the rise in infections with the Omicron BA.2 variant face enormous challenges. The logistics required are complex and need a

concerted political will to ensure these efforts isolate and restrict the mobility of millions of inhabitants while at the same time meeting their most basic needs.

Added to these are political pressures from global finance capitalism that have scorned every scientific effort to prioritize lives.

On Friday, Liang Wannian, head of the expert panel leading the country's COVID-19 response, addressed the media in Beijing. He likened the Zero-COVID policy to "insurance for the 1.4 billion people," given the dangers posed by Omicron. "The key is to effectively recognize and manage the source of transmission, cut transmission chains, and protect vulnerable groups so that the outbreak does not rebound on a large scale."

He added, "It would be a huge disaster" for China to relax restrictions. "Once we relax control, the virus will spread widely, and there will be many heavy cases and deaths among the elderly. The huge number of heavy cases will take a toll on the medical system, and if medical staff gets infected, medical services cannot be provided, and there will be a vicious cycle."

By Monday, Beijing was facing the beginning of a new surge of outbreaks, with 29 new COVID cases, up from 22 on Sunday. These are compounded by a rise in COVID cases last week in Jiangsu and Hebei provinces.

The outbreak in Beijing has been attributed to several cases discovered at a middle school in Chaoyang District, among a tour group and delivery service. Half of the 70 local COVID cases were found in that district, home to 3.5 million people, which includes several embassies and multinational companies. Classes were immediately suspended, and efforts were underway to screen more of the students and faculties in middle and primary schools in the area.

However, on the news of rising deaths in Shanghai, authorities in Beijing moved quickly to begin citywide testing to stamp out the outbreak before it reached similar levels. Additional measures included the lockdown of several residential compounds where COVID cases were discovered.

The news prompted a rush to grocery stores and markets to purchase daily necessities and foods in preparation for what many have surmised would become a citywide lockdown. The official city paper, *Beijing Daily*, wrote that the major supermarket chains had doubled their inventories. Operating hours were extended on Sunday, an unofficial acknowledgment of what was to come. However, based on a review of several media sources, the population has taken the reports in stride.

The emphasis in the Western mainstream press, however, continues to remain not on the effort to save lives but the disruption to global supply chains. *Time* magazine bemoaned that more than half of China's major cities continued to remain in some form of lockdown or restrictions, which included industrial centers like Changchun, Jilin, Tianjin, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou.

Professor Eswar Prasad, who teaches economics and trade policy at Cornell University and is a previous head of the IMF's China Division, told *Time*, "The already extensive disruptions to global supply chains are being exacerbated by the lockdowns in China, adding to the inflationary pressures and difficulties in procuring a broad range of consumer goods."

A top Huawei executive, Richard Yu, warned on WeChat, Chinese social media, "If Shanghai cannot resume production by May, all of the tech and industrial players who have supply chains in the area will come to a complete halt, especially the automotive industry. That will pose severe consequences and massive losses for the whole industry."

In a recent World Economic Outlook report published this month, the IMF said, "recent lockdowns in key manufacturing and trade hubs in China will likely compound supply disruptions elsewhere."

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Chinese stocks, as measured by the Shanghai Composite and CSI 300, fell the most in more than two years, down 5.1 and 4.9 percent. On Monday, global stocks fell sharply on fears over more lockdowns in China. These dramatic changes in stock indices have an indirect, but almost linear correlation to the lives saved. This proves in reverse the previous observation that stocks have generally risen with the number that have died from COVID.



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