

Zero-COVID strategy drives Omicron cases down across China

Benjamin Mateus
28 April 2022

Despite the claims in the corporate media in the US and elsewhere that there is an accelerating wave of COVID-19 in China, the actual figures demonstrate that Chinese public health workers are successfully containing an outbreak of Omicron BA.2. The number of infections is significantly lower than in the United States—where the Biden administration claims that coronavirus is no longer a pandemic—and fewer Chinese have died in two months than die in the US every single day.

The death toll in the US has fallen to a “low” of about 400 a day. By contrast, the cumulative death toll in China since Omicron BA.2 invaded the country from overseas in early March is 287—over a period of nearly 60 days! During the same period, 42,000 Americans have lost their lives to COVID-19, more than 100 times as many as in China.

By midnight of April 27, 2022, the National Health Commission (NHC) of the People’s Republic of China had confirmed 4,923 deaths across mainland China. On March 1, 2022, that figure was at 4,636. All but two of these 287 deaths occurred in Shanghai, the main financial hub and a center of both manufacturing and world trade, when cases began to explode in mid-March.

The first of these deaths in the financial hub occurred on April 17, when three fatalities were reported. By then, cases had peaked with a seven-day average of daily cases at 26,412, and several rounds of mass testing had already been conducted. The lockdown was approaching its third week.

Two days later, on April 19, another seven deaths were reported, raising mainland China’s total to 4,648. The next day brought another seven deaths, and the day after, eight, bringing the total to 4,663. On April 22, Shanghai saw its first double-digit count in deaths with 11 fatalities, and the number rose to 12 the day after, bringing the cumulative number to 4,686.

Last Saturday, April 24, Shanghai health authorities reported a sudden jump in fatalities to 39 deaths, and then on Saturday, another 51. The rise in counts has remained stable since, with 51 on Monday and 48 on Tuesday. Yesterday, 47 perished.

Since March 1, 2022, there have been 677,980 COVID cases across the mainland, with the lion’s share of infections in Shanghai, 558,147 as of Wednesday. Yet, little more than 96,000 of these cases were confirmed as symptomatic. In other words, if not for mass testing and contact tracing, almost 80 percent of community infections could have been missed.

Assuming a commonly accepted infection fatality ratio (IFR) for COVID of around 0.5 percent, another 300 deaths can be expected

over the next few weeks at the present levels of symptomatic infections.

The importance of making such a detailed account of these statistics is that, repeatedly, various media outlets have cited experts claiming that the numbers reported by Chinese authorities are rigged to provide a rosier picture of their pandemic response and therefore shouldn’t be trusted. The apparent political intent is to malign the Zero-COVID policy and the efforts to prioritize the population’s lives over “the economy,” i.e., corporate profit.

For instance, CNN quoted infectious disease expert Dr. Peter Collignon, an Australian National University Medical School professor, saying that Shanghai should have had as many as 700 deaths for every 100,000 cases because Hong Kong had 9,000 COVID deaths out of 1.19 million infections in January 2022. Minneapolis epidemiologist Dr. Michael Osterholm and others have made similar statements.

As to the lower death count, first, the response in Shanghai has been far different than what transpired in Hong Kong. Early medical attention and treatment can stem complications from an infection. Every effort is being made to administer and attend to asymptomatic and symptomatic cases.

Second, given the data being presented by the NHC, the time course of infections to deaths is proceeding according to expected epidemiological predictions. The apparent lower death toll *as compared to all reported cases* has everything to do with the Chinese health authorities identifying all infections, which commonly has not occurred in other countries.

During the massive waves of infections in Europe, the US, and everywhere Omicron gained a firm foothold, the positivity rate spiraled upwards, implying a significant undercount of infections. Most cases being reported are among symptomatic patients seeking medical attention.

For instance, according to Worldometer, there have been 82.8 million COVID infections during the pandemic. However, according to a recent seroprevalence study by the Centers for Disease and Prevention (CDC), the actual estimate of COVID infections by February 2022 is closer to 200 million. And this does not consider a considerable rate of reinfections.

Suppose we were to employ the 0.5 percent IFR rule for COVID, based on the 80 million estimated infections. In that case, the US would be expected to suffer 400,000 COVID deaths. But the current official death toll is approaching one million, consistent, based on the IFR, with an infection total of 200 million.

Presently, close to 400 people are still dying from COVID every day. But these grim tolls are spun in a positive light by the White House and its coronavirus experts.

Despite the turmoil Chinese health officials faced in the latter part of March and into April, their persistent efforts appear to be gaining on the virus. Indeed, many of the recent reports in the bourgeois press have begrudgingly acknowledged that efforts to contain the pandemic are proving effective.

The current seven-day average of daily cases has declined to 17,000, a 35 percent decline over 11 days since its peak. On Wednesday, there were only 11,285 new locally transmitted infections across the mainland, the lowest figure since April 3. If we exclude cases reported in Shanghai, mainland China found only 663 locally transmitted cases yesterday. In Jilin province, site of the initial outbreak in the northeast, COVID cases are down to 154.

Shanghai too has reported its lowest figures since the mid-April peaks of over 27,000 COVID cases. Yesterday there were just 10,622 COVID cases reported, of which 1,292 were symptomatic, prompting officials to begin the steps to exit lockdown by easing restrictions in districts where COVID-19 infections were eliminated.

However, the outbreak in Beijing is being followed carefully by the world press as authorities explained that for about a week, community transmission was occurring undetected. Most of the initial cases were discovered in Chaoyang District at a middle school, pushing authorities to respond expeditiously.

Yesterday, 48 symptomatic and two asymptomatic cases were reported in China's capital, underscoring the concern that the outbreak is far more extensive than current figures indicate. Efforts are underway to conduct three rounds of mass testing citywide this week, with the first completed on Monday for the more than 19.8 million residents.

As in Shanghai, a jump in cases is expected. It is not a harbinger of an explosion of cases, but a product of the systematic effort to find all infections to assist in long-established public health controls and to eliminate the pathogen from the community. Currently, only Chaoyang District is in lockdown while movement restrictions are enacted in high-risk neighborhoods. A wider lockdown may be implemented should the citywide testing indicate community spread is much more extensive.

Rather than applauding the monumental and essential efforts undertaken to contain these outbreaks, the spokespersons for the financial oligarchs decry these efforts. Colm Rafferty, chairman of the Beijing-based American Chamber of Commerce in China, told the *Wall Street Journal*, "Today, the situation in Beijing appears to be stable, but we remain concerned about the possibility of a citywide lockdown."

The *Journal* added, "A total of 46 cities and their 343 million inhabitants across the country were under partial or full lockdowns or faced some degree of movement restrictions as of Monday ... These cities account for more than 24 percent of China's population and over 35 percent of its gross domestic product."

The *Journal* never bothers to ask, "To what extent did Omicron disrupt economic activity in the US?" More than 80 million people were infected from December through February, accounting for

one-quarter of the US population. It also killed 170,000 people during that period, including a substantial number of previously fully vaccinated individuals.

More than 8.7 million Americans were out of the labor market because of COVID or caring for someone infected. More than 5.3 million parents and caregivers were taking care of children who were home from school, and airlines had to cancel flights due to labor shortages. As businesses, restaurants, and retail stores were cutting back hours, health care workers were once more being brought to the brink of exhaustion as emergency rooms and hospitals were brimming with infected patients.

Chris Williamson, a chief business economist at IHS Markit, said of the pronounced pullback in services and manufacturing sectors, "Soaring virus cases have brought the US economy to a near standstill at the start of the year."

The *Journal* wrote on January 24, "In the US, IHS Markit's composite purchasing managers index—which measures activity in both the manufacturing and services sectors—fell to 50.8 in January from 57 in December, to hit an 18-month low ... Much of the economic impact comes from COVID-related staff absences, Simon MacAdam, senior global economist at Capital Economics, said in a note to clients."

To have allowed the coronavirus to run roughshod over the Chinese population would have been another historic assault on the international working class, one of many they have endured during the pandemic.

However, based on current trends, the Zero-COVID strategy should end the present threat by the virus in China in less time than it took for Omicron to sweep through the populations of the US and Europe like a tsunami. On a social scale, measures to eliminate the virus have consistently proven the correct response. However, the war against the coronavirus is a war against the socioeconomic conditions that allow the threat to persist. Defeating the virus will require a frontal assault against capitalism.



To contact the WWSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact