

China tallies three consecutive days of record COVID-19 infections

Benjamin Mateus
25 November 2022

On Thursday, Friday and Saturday, China's National Health Commission (NHC) reported three consecutive record numbers of COVID-19 infections, 32,943, 31,656, and 35,183, respectively. The outbreak is the most geographically widespread to date, with five provinces—Guangdong, Chongqing, Beijing, Sichuan and Hebei—reporting over 1,000 daily new cases on Friday and Saturday, and eight other provinces reporting over 500 new cases.

Guangdong province in the Southeast is at the epicenter of the current outbreak, with 8,476 COVID cases reported Friday, followed by Chongqing with 6,500, Hebei with 3,375, Beijing with 1,860, and Sichuan with 1,310.

Rather than implementing full-scale lockdowns and mass testing of the population to bring the rapid, multi-city rise in cases under control, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is waffling and demonstrably unsure of how to proceed as they employ halfhearted mitigation measures by way of reaction rather than a more deeply considered public health approach.

For instance, the five-day lockdown in Guangzhou's most populous district of Baiyun will do little to stem the tide of infections. It will promote locals' distrust and suspicion of public health authorities and exacerbate future efforts to implement infection controls. Implementing the Zero-COVID measures necessary to save lives and well-being requires a whole-of-society approach based on clear communication and the deployment of resources to protect the population.

In Chongqing, resources are already being overwhelmed, with the region's 41,000 quarantine beds already filled with patients. The Deputy Director of the Chongqing Health Commission told reporters that the municipality is hurrying to construct new facilities that can hold close to 50,000 more people, with over 5,000 construction workers now laboring around the clock to complete the centers in five days.

In China's capital city of Beijing, health authorities have shifted to haphazardly introducing modified lockdown measures, causing disarray and panic across the sprawling urban center of more than 22 million people. Health authorities are asking residents to voluntarily stay in their apartment compounds for a few days, while the number of businesses being forced to close their activities is growing.

Panic buying has once again left many supermarket shelves

empty as families try to stock their pantries, unsure if the measures being implemented will take on a protracted character. Improvised quarantine centers and field hospitals are now under construction, while many schools have shifted to online classes.

The current surge in cases across China proves that attempting to compromise with the Zero-COVID public health stance can only lead to disastrous results.

The bankrupt "Twenty Articles," which attempt to balance economic prerogatives with the relaxation of public health measures at the core of Zero-COVID, was a doomed strategy at its conception. This is quickly being demonstrated on a day-to-day basis as COVID-19 infections continue to spread along with protests and opposition to the relaxations of pandemic measures.

As one resident in Shijiazhuang wrote on social media after authorities canceled regular PCR testing, "It is absurd and irresponsible to suddenly relax all measures when the number of infections is rising rapidly. This is by no means scientific."

There is growing mistrust of health authorities attempting to downplay the risks of infections and shifting the burden of responsibility onto individuals, while at the same time claiming they are not relaxing Zero-COVID.

To place the current public health crises in perspective, vaccination rates must be assessed.

According to Our World in Data, an astounding 1.27 billion people (89 percent of China's population) have completed the initial two-dose vaccine protocol. Around 3.44 billion COVID-19 vaccines have been administered since the vaccination campaign began. However, China had delivered 3.3 billion vaccines by April 12, 2022, meaning that nearly the entire population received their last dose more than seven months ago.

As of November 24, 2022, cumulative COVID-19 cases in China have reached a mere 1.38 million, the lowest per capita infection rate of any country with over 1 million population. Given that China is home to 1.412 billion people, only 0.1 percent of the population has been previously infected and 99.9 remain immunologically naive from prior infection.

A recent study found that the current iteration of Omicron subvariants demonstrate near complete immune evasion against

antibodies generated by people who received at least three doses of the Sinovac COVID vaccine, the most common vaccine in China, meaning that virtually the entire Chinese population is at risk of infection with COVID-19. Sinovac has also been shown to provide less protection against hospitalization and death than mRNA vaccines.

The situation is most precarious for the elderly. According to data from *Statista*, by mid-March 2022 only 51 percent of Chinese people 80 years and older had completed their initial vaccine series and only 20 percent had received a third dose. For the 70-79 age bracket, 82 percent had completed their two-dose series and less than half were boosted, while those in the 60-69 age bracket were only slightly better off. In an article Friday, the *Washington Post* noted, “Just 40 percent of Chinese older than 80 have received a booster shot,” adding, “Among people older than 60, two-thirds have gotten a booster.”

The increasingly precarious situation in China is viewed as a positive good by the imperialist powers and their corporate media, which have continuously demanded the lifting of Zero-COVID in order to fully restore capitalist production and the exploitation of the Chinese working class.

The same *Post* article begins by stating, “A coronavirus outbreak on the verge of being China’s biggest of the pandemic has exposed a critical flaw in Beijing’s ‘zero COVID’ strategy: a vast population without natural immunity. After months with only occasional hot spots in the country, most of its 1.4 billion people have never been exposed to the virus.”

They chide the Chinese authorities for prioritizing containment and elimination over diverting resources to building their health care system and developing their intensive care capacity, while having the audacity to promote the reactionary, unscientific claim that China would have done well to allow a “degree of community transmission” to raise population immunity. This is, in essence, the “Focused Protection” nonsense of the Great Barrington Declaration.

Viral evolution towards more immune-evasive and contagious strains has proven again and again the bankruptcy of the “herd immunity” policy which the *Post* and the financial markets now demand be adopted in China. This criminal policy has led to the deaths of over 20 million people across the globe, including over 1.1 million just in the United States. It is a public health policy which is best described as “social murder” and the “normalization of death.”

The experience in Hong Kong in February is a stark reminder of the impact that a tsunami of COVID-19 infections will have on the population if China’s public health initiatives completely collapse. A modeling study published in the journal *Nature* in May looked at various mitigation scenarios if Zero-COVID was lifted, and found that hospitals and ICUs would be overwhelmed for several weeks. In a worst-case scenario, approximately 1.55 million people could perish, afflicting primarily the oldest and least vaccinated.

Nomura economist Lu Ting warned, “When the infection

number quickly soars, it will be a big blow to the health care system, and the whole society. Large-scale infections will have a negative impact across consumption, production, and logistics.”

Goldman Sachs economists have estimated China will completely reopen by second quarter of next year if not sooner, writing, “The Chinese economy is likely a distinct ‘two halves’ next year, as the initial stage of China’s reopening may be negative to growth, with COVID cases surging and population mobility temporarily declining—similar to the reopening experiences of several other East Asian economies.”

However, Zhang Zhiwei, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset management, offered an alternative hypothesis. He said, “If [the exit from zero-COVID] is relatively slow, or the policy goes back and forth, there is a huge question mark over whether an economic recovery will be achieved in the second half.”

This week, Jörg Wuttke, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, wrote a letter to Beijing’s acting mayor Yin Yong demanding to know why the city has implemented a limited partial lockdown. He wrote, “A lack of adequate preparation has resulted in district governments and/or communities managing the recent outbreak in the same way as they did previously, by locking down businesses—with several having been mandatorily closed despite not being in a high-risk area—residences and other public venues.”

He then threatened, “This is very concerning, given that Shanghai’s experience from earlier this year has shown that after long-term lockdowns, many foreign nationals are likely to leave China. This would be detrimental to Beijing’s goal of developing into an international city.”

While the financial elite demand that China lift Zero-COVID in one fell swoop, the CCP seeks to do so more gradually. Under either scenario, the impacts of the abandonment of Zero-COVID on the health of the Chinese working class would be catastrophic and must be opposed.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact