

COVID-19 infections surge in China

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The speed and scale of the spread of COVID infections as a result of China's new "let it rip" policy are unprecedented.

China's abandonment of Zero-COVID has also meant abandoning any meaningful tracking of real figures in terms of case counts and deaths. Estimates by various scientists and epidemiologists, however, provide a horrific account of the public health crisis sweeping across the country.

Many provinces and local CDCs have sought to track infection rates through weekly surveys. These estimates have shown a dramatic surge in infections, with major cities exceeding the 50 percent of the population mark. According to the *Asia Times*, "More than 80 percent of the 22 million people in Beijing and 70 percent of the 25 million people in Shanghai have been infected by the coronavirus so far."

The epidemiologist and former chief scientist and doctoral supervisor at the Chinese Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Zeng Guang, told the *Times* that "as most Chinese cities reported that 50 percent of their people had tested positive, it was reasonable to estimate about 40 percent of the country's population on average could have been infected."

The implication of the statement is staggering. That means that since the abandonment of Zero-COVID, possibly 600 million people in China may have been infected with SARS-CoV-2. The *Times* report also indicated that the cumulative case count could well reach 1.1 billion in the next several weeks.

China is likely seeing more than one million infections daily and the number of deaths at over 5,000 to 9,000 per day, according to British health data firm Airfinity. They are expecting deaths to climb to as high as 25,000 per day in late January.

While the present wave of infections is expected to peak sometime in January, reaching to 3.7 million daily cases, another surge in March will be forthcoming as the outbreak spreads into rural regions after the Lunar New Year holidays. Estimates for the total number of excess deaths due to COVID are upwards of over one million from various institutes which are tracking these figures.

Because the Chinese Communist Party, through its

National Health Commission (NHC), has changed the way it has counted COVID cases and deaths, a precise tally has become impossible. Researchers and epidemiologists have resorted to mathematical modeling and indirect estimates such as scenes of crowded hospital wards and bodies overflowing funeral homes and crematoriums to get a glimmer of the scope of the public health crisis.

To place this distinction into stark contrast, China's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), on Tuesday, January 3, reported the country had only experienced 4,804 new COVID cases and three deaths. That is 25 deaths in all since December 1, 2022. These are based on the very narrow definitions that severely undercount cases and deaths.

According to the NHC, a case is defined as someone with a positive test who is symptomatic, and a COVID death is a death caused by COVID-related respiratory failure or pneumonia. If a person dies with a heart attack and is positive for COVID, these will not be counted. If the exact cause of death is unknown despite the individual having contracted the virus, this too will remain off their ledger.

Meanwhile, reports from various health systems like Wuhan Union Hospital state that they have received 16,358 COVID patients since December 7, of which 5,414 (33 percent) are in serious condition. Yin Shuaijun, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, attempting to determine the number of severe cases across the country, found that 0.51 percent of Wuhan's population of 13.6 million, or 70,000, had severe COVID.

In the northeastern city of Qingdao, with 10.1 million people, 0.48 percent, or 48,500, were reported to have severe COVID. Based on his calculations, there may well be more than five million severe cases of COVID, which implies that the death toll from COVID is far higher than the NHC is reporting.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been asking Chinese authorities for the "regular sharing of specific and real-time data on the epidemiological situation, including more genetic sequencing data, data on disease impact including hospitalizations, intensive care unit (ICU) admission and deaths – and data on vaccinations delivered

and vaccination status, especially in vulnerable people and those over 60 years old.”

The issue was escalated yesterday when Dr. Mike Ryan, head of WHO’s emergencies program, openly rebuked Beijing’s handling of the pandemic. He told reporters, “We believe the current numbers being published from China underrepresent the true impact of the disease in terms of hospital admissions, in terms of ICU admissions, particularly in terms of deaths.”

In response to the WHO’s criticism, echoing Xi Jinping’s New Year’s Eve “victory” over the virus address, China’s embassy in London released a response that said, “the country had always put the people and their lives above all else” and “always shared its information and data responsibly with the international community.”

Meanwhile, reports of families keeping the decomposing corpses of their loved ones at home waiting for a hearse to arrive to take the body to a crematorium are making their way into the front pages of the mainstream press. The sudden surge in deaths has left funeral homes and crematoriums filled and unable to handle the number of deceased, which is running at five times the volume they typically handle.

As *Bloomberg* noted, “After hours of waiting, each family was given five to 10 minutes to mourn in a no-frills ceremony, fighting for space in a cramped room with bodies lying on stretchers, zipped up in yellow body bags.” Such was the scene at Shanghai’s Longhua Funeral Home.

Presently, the BF.7 and BA.5.2 subvariants of Omicron are dominant in Beijing and Guangzhou and BQ.1 and XBB in Shanghai, mainly due to travelers into the country. According to predictions made by researchers at Ruijin Hospital and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the peak of infections across major urban areas like Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, and Guangzhou has already passed.

But as Dr. Peng Jie, infectious disease specialist at Nanfang Hospital in Guangzhou, told the local news, he expected the surge in hospitalization to arrive later as the course of infection drives people, in particular the elderly and those with underlying illnesses, to seek medical attention.

Additionally, researchers are attempting to uncover the effect the Lunar New Year will have on transporting the coronavirus into rural provinces of China. Specifically, they are turning to suburbs of Chongqing, home to millions of working immigrants who will soon travel to see their families across distant regions. Epidemiologists estimate that by mid-to-late January, interior provinces like Gansu, Qinghai and Shaanxi will be inundated with infections.

Chen Saijuan, the lead author of an epidemiological study of the current surge of Omicron infections, underscored the

need to divert resources to the rural regions and small to medium-sized cities, where the number of elderly with underlying health comorbidities is higher, making them more vulnerable to infections. The weak medical infrastructure bodes poorly for the population in these areas.

In unison and collectively, countries such as the US, France, Spain, Italy, Israel, Australia, Canada, Japan, India, South Korea, and most recently, Morocco, have implemented travel bans on China, demanding travelers have a COVID-negative test and even quarantine on arrival. As South Korea’s Health and Welfare Minister Cho Kyoo-hong said on Wednesday, “We must keep vigilant to prevent China’s spread of coronavirus from affecting Korea.”

Such bans are known to be completely ineffective and politically motivated. Japan is currently facing the highest death toll from COVID in the entire pandemic. The US is seeing a surge of new infections with the highly infective and pathogenic XBB.1.5 subvariant that is pushing hospitalizations in the Northeast among the elderly to pandemic highs. There is no basis for the new travel bans but to use the pandemic as a political weapon against China.

The abandonment of Zero-COVID was a social crime on the part of the Chinese Communist Party perpetrated against the Chinese working class. But they have only joined the ranks of the capitalist rulers of US and Europe in their complete disregard for the human tragedy and suffering they have caused and continue to cause.

The fourth year of the pandemic will be the continuation of the endless barbaric policies that continue to esteem profit at any cost with complete utter contempt for the welfare of their populations. Only the working class, on an international scientific socialist perspective, can end the insanity of this “forever COVID” policy.



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