

Chinese National Health Commission discloses 60,000 deaths since abandoning Zero COVID

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On Saturday, China's leading public health institution, the National Health Commission (NHC), revealed that between December 8, 2022, when Chinese authorities announced the complete scrapping of all remaining aspects of its prior Zero-COVID public health program, and January 12, a total of 59,938 COVID-19-related deaths took place.

President Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were under intense international scrutiny to reveal the true extent of their public health crisis after lifting essentially all mitigation measures to contain the coronavirus and allowing a tsunami of hundreds of millions of infections to rip through the country.

As late as January 12, health authorities had confirmed that a mere 37 people had died from the virus, a figure known to be completely erroneous and outrageous given the three years of experience with the pandemic.

Several modeling estimates made by various research institutes estimated that the first wave of COVID infections in China could cause upwards of 2 million deaths. Even economists at Barclays had predicted that the Omicron wave would have a fatality rate of 0.4 percent among the unvaccinated, while the fully vaccinated might see a rate of 0.02 percent.

A study published in *Nature Medicine* estimated that in the last week of December approximately 76 percent of Beijing's 22 million people had been infected, and by the end of January that figure would rise to 92 percent.

The figure provided by the NHC is clearly intended to suppress any real assessment of the crisis sweeping over China. Many photos and videos taken at crematoriums show these facilities operating at capacity, indicating a significant shift in the number of people seeking to give their deceased family members a respectable burial. Last week, the *Washington Post* released a report using

satellite imagery to show that several crematoriums in densely populated centers were seeing record numbers of visitors.

World Health Organization (WHO) COVID-19 Technical Lead, Dr. Maria van Kerkhove, spoke on China's outbreak at a media briefing last Wednesday, noting: "There are some very important gaps that we are working with China to fill. First and foremost is to have a really deeper understanding of the transmission dynamics of COVID across the country."

On Saturday, before the NHC's release of figures on COVID-19 fatalities, WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus spoke with NHC head Ma Xiaowei on the country's current COVID-19 prevention and control measures.

The figures presented Saturday only substantiate that the CCP is carrying out a statistical sleight of hand with the numbers to appease the WHO and international media. It is doing so in accordance with every other country that has dismantled COVID-19 testing and tracking metrics and allowed the pandemic to rip under its public health radar.

An article in the CCP-aligned *Global Times* said, "China has insisted on classifying deaths of patients with a positive nucleic acid test as COVID-19-related deaths, which is in line with WHO and international standards." This was intended as a rebuke to the hypocrisy evident in numerous recent critiques by the Western media and governments about China's actions on COVID-19, while these governments carried out similar measures in forcing their populations to accept mass infection and death.

In order to suppress official figures, Chinese health authorities have maintained a strict definition of COVID-19 fatality that must include respiratory failure caused by the virus. This misses a significant number of

people who have died at home or from other causes not directly attributable to respiratory failure but from by-products of their infection.

Jiao Yahui, an NHC official, told the *Global Times* that 90.1 percent of the nearly 60,000 fatalities were above the age of 65, 56.5 percent over 80, and a significant majority had underlying health conditions when they died. However, Jiao added that only 5,503 were due to respiratory failure caused by SARS-CoV-2, and the other 54,435 died *with* COVID and not *from* COVID, in line with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) definition. In other words, confirmed COVID-19 deaths in China have ostensibly risen only twofold.

In its article on the NHC data update, the *New York Times* noted: "The lack of transparency prompted several countries, including Japan and South Korea, to impose travel curbs on Chinese visitors after China reopened its borders last Sunday. Experts also warned that playing down the severity of the outbreak could lead people within the country to take fewer precautions."

The hint of moralizing in these statements from the bourgeois press is hypocritical and cynical, as Japan is currently facing the highest mortality rate from COVID-19 it has ever experienced. In the US, the weekly death rate has jumped to almost 4,000, or an average of around 550 per day, a byproduct of the national spread of the highly infectious and immune-resistant XBB.1.5 variant.

In response to the growing number of daily new COVID-19 deaths in the US, *Washington Post* contributing columnist Leana Wen, one of the most notorious pandemic minimizers, wrote an opinion piece falsely claiming that the US is overcounting COVID-19 deaths and hospitalizations. She stated: "According to the [CDC], the United States is experiencing around 400 COVID deaths every day. At that rate, there would be nearly 150,000 deaths a year. But are these Americans dying *from* COVID or *with* COVID?"

Since Omicron has dominated the pandemic, excess deaths have remained stubbornly high, not only in the US but across Europe, Australia and other regions that have been tracking and documenting their mortality data. These deaths are partly due directly to COVID-19 and complications experienced from COVID-19 infections that can impose a significant toll on the body's various organ systems. In addition, the pandemic's toll on every social aspect of life has been catastrophic, and the US has led many high-income countries in declines in life expectancy amid a free-fall in its health care and public

health infrastructure.

The concept of dying "from" versus "with" COVID is a right-wing talking point manufactured first by Donald Trump, which was then embraced by the entire political and media establishment early on in the Omicron wave, alongside the oft-stated but false notion that the strain was mild. Indeed, more than 277,000 Americans officially died from Omicron in 2022. The peak in deaths in January–February 2022 was second only to the first winter wave, from December 2020 to January 2021, when the vaccines were first being distributed.

A widely shared thread posted by Gregory Travis over the weekend places the political issues behind this ploy into perspective. It must be noted that the same data manipulation now on display in China was first pioneered in the US.

Next Sunday, January 22, will be the official beginning of the Lunar New Year, with officials forecasting that more than 2 billion trips will take place across the country over 40 days, the largest annual human migration in the world. Chinese officials have been more forthcoming about the concerns of bringing COVID-19 to rural regions, where vaccine uptake has been much lower and health care systems are much less able to cope with a deluge of patients.

A post on the Chinese social media platform WeChat from a small town in central Henan province noted, "In the face of a virus like Omicron, all people should be equal, but the fact is that as far as the virus is concerned, urban and rural areas are not equal. Not only are resources and opportunities unequal, but there is also a wide gap in the understanding of how to handle public health."



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