

Six months after the lifting of Zero-COVID

China's second wave of COVID infections, deaths, Long COVID, and government lies: Part 2

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This is the second part of a four-part article. Read Part 1 here, Part 3 here and Part 4 here.

Social media reveals brutal reality of ongoing mass infection

While many of China's health care experts falsely claim that COVID-19 symptoms are mild, reinfections are harmless, Long COVID is largely a myth and all is well, what is the actual social reality?

On June 11, the Chinese CDC released an update on the pandemic, reporting only 2,777 severe cases and 164 deaths between May 1 and May 31. Due to the dismantling of testing and data reporting systems, these figures are vast under-counts. Nevertheless, the test positivity rate for COVID-19 soared from about 3 percent at the beginning of April to 42.5 percent at the end of May, shedding some light on the scale of unreported infections and potentially severe cases and deaths.

On social media, COVID-19 infections have again come to the center of discussion during the second wave of the pandemic. According to Baidu Index, a large data application that monitors internet activity related to certain keywords, the frequency of COVID-related searches nationwide peaked on May 23, when there were almost 23 million searches about COVID-19. This search index still remains at a high level of 14 million today. Another similar Baidu Index shows that on May 25 almost 280,000 people consulted doctors online about COVID-19 infections during a single day.

For many, the symptoms they have to suffer through are in no way "mild." It is not uncommon to come across posts by young people who have ended up in the emergency room and hospitalized during this ongoing second wave of mass infection.

The term "blade throat"—describing extreme soreness, so painful that it feels like someone is cutting one's throat with a blade—has been trending for quite a while. Other common symptoms among previously very healthy young people are body pains, headaches ("as if someone is thawing my skull"), cold sweats, nasal congestion ("cement-sealed noses"), loss of taste and smell, coughing through the night, low fever that will not go away, echoes in the ears, rashes, and more.

These common symptoms, though often not life-threatening, still torture millions of people at present and are by no means comparable to common colds. Most people report that it takes at least a few weeks to completely recover from the illness and resume daily activities. Even for those whose symptoms seemed relatively mild and who recovered quickly, many

discovered later through a CT scan that they have already had lung damage or even partial pulmonary fibrosis.

A recent thread asking readers to share their most painful symptom after contracting COVID-19 garnered more than 1,500 replies. Some of the most representative comments are the following:

- It hurts so much. Every swallow feels like torture to me.
- I feel the same [soreness in the throat]. I really want to donate my throat to someone else.
- I got "blade throat" as well ... I want to smash my head into the wall so much.
- This is the first time that my head aches so much that I threw up.
- It feels like someone is drilling my head.

Another much-liked comment under the same thread says what hurts most after getting COVID-19 is "losing all my salary because I asked for sick leave," echoing the dilemma shared by many forced to lose pay or their jobs by staying home to rest and protecting others from infection.

Under another comment that says, "Testing positive means you are ill and you should rest at home," someone replied, "but my boss disagrees." Similar comments were made about "having to drag my sore body to work" because working from home is not allowed.

In response to Dr. Zhong Nanshan's prediction of 65 million weekly infections at the peak of the second wave, people expressed their doubts and anger about whether there will ever be an end to COVID-19 waves under the current "let-it-rip" policy:

- My whole family tested positive. The pediatric clinic here has no more beds. If your kid is not feeling well, you'll still need to make a reservation in advance. My baby is only a month old but still infected.
- I think [the estimate is real] because I'm the nurse at my company's hospital wing. Many employees came to get cold remedies from me recently.
- I'm panicking as I just got pregnant. [This comment received almost 100 likes]
- Fine. I just tested positive. But I have to take Gaokao [the national college entrance exam] in just 6 days.
- I don't understand. Are we just going to have wave after wave every half-year? Everyone would be dead after a few rounds.
- If it's really like a cold, then it's not a big deal. But what if your health condition declines after every infection? Not to mention all the lingering symptoms! I feel like we at most can hang in there for a few years. I've lost hope in life.
- My 50-day old baby tested positive. I feel even worse when I see my kid suffer.

Others commented on the impossibility of preventing infections on

one's own, without any public health measures:

- It's too difficult! The first wave was okay, and none of [my family] got infected. But what should I do during this wave? My older kid is in middle school. He goes in at 7 in the morning and comes home at 8 in the evening. He [is at school] for 13 hours a day and has to eat two meals. How could he always keep his mask on? My older kid passed the virus to me and his dad, and I infected the younger kid. My whole family was infected during the second wave, three for the first time, and one for the second time! I just have to ask, how do we protect kids who have to go to school?

- You just cannot [prevent infections at school]. At every class in my school, more than a dozen students are with fever. Teachers tested positive too. I was infected by a student myself.

There is also anger over the blatant lies promoted by the mainstream media and their efforts to deliberately sow confusion, with one comment stating:

It was you experts who said things will be fine and it's just a cold! It was you who told us to let our guard down. If it weren't for you, how would it be possible that kindergarten kids are not wearing masks at all? I put on a mask for my kid in the morning but it was gone when I picked her up from kindergarten in the evening. People don't wear masks not because the weather is getting hot, but because you experts say the virus is not that bad and it's just a cold. A simple sentence from you has cost so many lives. No wonder no one trusts you anymore.

As health care experts declare that "for normal people, COVID can be treated as regular flus," they ignore a large section of the population with underlying conditions, as well as the elderly and immunocompromised. According to WHO statistics, China is home to an estimated 141 million people with diabetes and 270 million with high blood pressure. Ample evidence has also shown that Omicron and its subvariants can be dangerous to people who are fully vaccinated and otherwise healthy.

Widespread reports of further deaths of loved ones

Even though social media platforms by no means give a panoramic view of COVID-related tragedies, they can still provide a glimpse into the social crimes committed by the lifting of Zero-COVID, whose scale is vastly greater than the 164 official COVID-19 deaths reported by the CDC in May.

One recent widely shared thread on social media said an elderly person in their family who was recently infected with COVID-19 for the first time has lung damage and has been admitted to the ICU. The thread says, "the doctor told us the hope [of survival] is less than 20% ... he cannot breathe without a ventilator ... and his lungs are all white [in the CT image]." This thread received more than 1,200 comments from people with similar experiences, including the following:

- My great grandfather is 86 years old. His lungs are more than half white. He has difficulty breathing. After being hospitalized for 8 days, he finally made it through. But it took him really long to recover.

- My grandfather's lungs were all white too and he passed the day before yesterday.

- My grandfather is 87. His temperature was fine during the day but a fever started in the evening. After he was hospitalized, his lungs were 40% white. ... He originally started to recover after receiving proper

treatment and was conscious. However, we were told today that his condition was unstable again. His blood oxygen is only 60 and white blood cell indices are going up. The doctor said there's not much hope, and we should take time to think about what to do.

- My grandmother was recently infected for the first time. She had some low fevers but her [COVID] test result turned negative very soon. However, we found out that her lungs were all white. ... She didn't want to be in the ICU and eventually passed away last weekend. It was only a week between infection and death.

- My grandmother passed away the day before yesterday, and her lungs were all white.

- My grandfather's blood oxygen was as low as 30-40 last weekend.

Each of these comments is echoed with several heart-broken responses of "the same happened to me as well."

Under another thread titled, "COVID took away my dad," over 100 comments spoke of similar tragedies.

- COVID took away my dad. He is only 59.

- COVID took away my dad as well. He is only 66. I'm so heartbroken and filled with remorse. I wish it had all just been a dream.

- My dad left on the same day, because of COVID. My kid is only about to enter middle school. Yesterday, I saw a daughter pushing her dad around in a wheelchair and was so envious. I wept again.

- COVID took away my mom as well. It was only two-and-a-half days from her infection to death.

- My dad passed away on May 10 because of COVID. Just a month from today. I never thought that after taking him to the hospital as usual, I would never be able to bring him home again.

- My father also walked into the hospital himself, and we all thought he would walk out of there as well.

- My father passed away during the first wave of infection, before the New Year, after the lifting [of Zero-COVID].

- My father passed away around the same time, on the last day of 2022. It has been half a year, but every time I think about him, I feel so sad.

- Same for my dad. He left us forever on January 26. I still wake up in tears in the middle of the night.

Threads and comments like these can be found everywhere on the internet in China. Another widely-shared post reads:

My grandfather was infected during this wave and passed away the day before yesterday. Everything happened so quickly. He was able to eat and talk before going into the ICU. Things went down so rapidly just in two days. I'm so devastated. Before he passed, he was trying to speak but could not, because of the ventilator.

In some cases, COVID threatened to take away both parents. "My mother died of COVID just 5 months ago. My father now was re-infected. He has a high fever of 39 and taking antipyretic doesn't seem to help."

To be continued



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