

China's lifting of Zero-COVID and the ongoing dangers of the pandemic

Evan Blake

27 December 2022

As the year 2022 draws to a close, a dangerous new stage of the COVID-19 pandemic has opened with the universal lifting of all measures that slow the spread of the coronavirus. Throughout the world, governments have decided to allow COVID-19 to spread entirely unchecked, infecting or reinfecting billions of people. This policy allows the virus to mutate and produce new and potentially more dangerous variants.

The global epicenter of the pandemic is now China, where the ruling Communist Party (CCP) has dismantled its Zero-COVID policy, which had kept China's per capita infection and death rates the lowest of any major country. Since November 11, the CCP has ended lockdowns, mass testing, contact tracing, quarantine and isolation protocols and every other public health measure.

On Monday, China's National Health Commission (NHC) reclassified COVID-19 from a Class A to a Class B infectious disease starting on January 8, prompting the scrapping of all quarantine requirements for inbound travelers. This followed Sunday's NHC announcement that it will no longer report COVID-19 infections, after last week adjusting its definition of a COVID-19 death in a transparent effort to suppress all data on the spread of the pandemic.

The reversal of Zero-COVID in China has produced a wave of mass infection. A leaked report by Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention Deputy Director Sun Yang estimated that 248 million people were infected with COVID-19 across China during the first 20 days of December. The majority of China's 1.4 billion people are expected to be infected over the next two months amid the Lunar New Year travel season.

Hospitals in Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities are collapsing under a massive influx of patients, morgues are suspending burial services, and hundreds, if not thousands, of people are believed to be dying at home every day. Social media posts by people suffering from

Long COVID describe prolonged symptoms, including extreme fatigue, deep coughs, shortness of breath, difficulties concentrating and more.

Breaking his month-long silence on the disastrous spread of COVID throughout China, President Xi Jinping employed Orwellian double-speak at a press conference Monday, stating, "We should launch the patriotic health campaign in a more targeted way... fortify a community line of defense for epidemic prevention and control, and effectively protect people's lives, safety and health."

In justifying the abandonment of Zero-COVID, CCP officials and the Chinese state media have repackaged all the lies and propaganda developed over the past year throughout the rest of the world, particularly in the United States. Referring to the Omicron variant as "mild," they falsely claim that the current surge of infections will be their "COVID exit wave." In the words of Zhong Nanshan, a doctor and spokesperson for the CCP's COVID policy, China will return to "pre-epidemic conditions" by mid-2023.

Three recent articles published in the *New York Times* and *Financial Times* have stated that China appears to be striving for "herd immunity" through rapid mass infection. But the reality is that "herd immunity" is a mirage manufactured by far-right politicians and corrupt scientists in 2020 and has no scientific basis. The Chinese population is being forced to join the rest of the world in a horrific cycle of ongoing mass COVID infections and reinfections, which will cause compounding damage to the physical and economic health of society, with global ramifications.

The future confronting Chinese society can be seen in the United States and throughout the Northern Hemisphere, where the third winter of mass infection is now underway.

Despite the suppression of data over the past year, throughout December official COVID-19 cases,

hospitalizations and deaths have climbed steadily in the US. According to more accurate wastewater sampling, COVID-19 is currently spreading at the third-highest rate of the entire pandemic, surpassed only by previous surges of Omicron subvariants last winter and spring.

Hospitalizations and deaths are increasingly impacting the elderly, with hospitalization rates among those 70 years and older now at the highest point since last winter. The seven-day average of daily new deaths now stands at 426, meaning that each week the number of Americans dying from COVID-19 is now equivalent to the death toll from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Over 90 percent of these deaths are people over the age of 65.

Last week, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed that life expectancy in the US decreased for the second year in a row in 2021, by roughly 0.6 years, bringing the figure to 76.4 years, the lowest level since 1996. The pandemic thus amounts to a social retrogression of roughly a quarter-century. This is part of a global trend, in which life expectancy declined worldwide in 2020 and 2021 for the first time since World War II. Notably, the first two years of the pandemic saw life expectancy increase in China and surpass the US in 2021, a process now set to reverse.

Another recent study on excess deaths found that COVID-19 was among the leading causes of death in 2020 and the leading cause of death in 2021 globally, killing a combined 14.83 million people by the end of 2021.

Alongside and connected to the spread of COVID-19, unprecedented numbers of children are being hospitalized by the flu and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), in what has been termed a “triple-demic.” Across the US, Canada, Germany and other countries in North America and Europe, pediatric hospitals are at or above capacity and children are dying from these preventable diseases.

A growing body of research indicates that COVID-19 can substantially damage a patient’s immune system, rendering them susceptible to more serious disease from other viral or bacterial infections. Many scientists and physicians have warned that the mass infection and reinfection of children and all of society with COVID-19 is a primary factor behind the present surge of hospitalizations due to other respiratory viruses.

Finally, the immense societal impact of Long COVID is increasingly coming into focus. According to the latest data from the CDC, roughly 17.7 million Americans are presently experiencing Long COVID, of whom 23.1 percent report that this affliction causes “significant

activity limitations.” The most significant study on COVID-19 reinfections, published in October, found that each reinfection greatly compounds one’s risk of Long COVID, a risk only slightly reduced by vaccination.

The growing volume of scientific data which prove the ongoing and alarming dangers of COVID-19 can only be covered up and suppressed with a continuous stream of lies and propaganda. In the United States, the White House, the corporate media and all official institutions peddle unending happy talk, speaking of the pandemic in the past tense and denigrating the most basic public health measures.

Last week, White House COVID Response Coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha absurdly stated, “There is no study in the world that shows that masks work that well.”

Media talking heads routinely compare COVID-19 to the flu and promote holiday shopping and travel. In August, US President Joe Biden declared, “the pandemic is over.”

This propaganda has had an impact, with a recent Ipsos poll finding that only 30 percent of Americans still wear masks at least some of the time, down from 90 percent in December 2020 and 69 percent just one year ago.

The deliberate disarming of the global population to the dangers of the pandemic and promotion of unending mass infection—from China to the US, and everywhere in between—places society in great danger in the face of future variants.

The laws of viral evolution are objective and detached from baseless claims of governments that COVID-19 will gradually become less dangerous. At any point, a new variant could evolve that combines increased immune-resistance, transmissibility and virulence, producing an even greater global wave of infections and deaths.

In 2023, the international working class must draw the political and scientific lessons from the first three years of the pandemic, reject the lies of the capitalist ruling elites and their pliant media, and take up a global struggle to stop the spread of COVID-19 and massively expand public health in every country. The capitalist subordination of human life to profit and the accumulation of wealth must be ended.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)