

Coronavirus puts Shanghai into a coma

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For more than a week, the rare resident of Shanghai who dared venture outside has encountered something unfamiliar: a surreal peace and quiet.

The deadly [coronavirus](#) epidemic has brought much of China to a standstill, but perhaps nowhere has the change been more stark than in

the country's biggest and most vibrant city.

Gone are the [traffic jams](#), crowded sidewalks and businessmen hurrying to work, replaced by eerily empty roads, shuttered bars and businesses, and only the occasional pedestrians—always behind a protective mask.

Shanghai is the most populous of China's many mega-cities, but its usual gathering points look like they were hit with a neutron bomb.

The scenic Bund riverfront is normally filled with gawkers taking in the European neo-classical architecture on one shore, facing a futuristic financial district on the other.

But the heavily-laden barges that usually keep the Huangpu River's surface churning have been absent, the towering corporate skyscrapers largely empty.

The stillness is only occasionally interrupted by the clang of the 90-metre-high (300-foot) clock tower atop the 93-year-old Shanghai Customs House.

Zhao Feng was one of only a few scattered amblers on the promenade on a recent day.

"We know it's not good to go outside, but we're wearing masks as a precaution," said Zhao, 40, on a stroll with family.

"(Shanghai) is so quiet because everybody has a strong sense of self-protection."

Stir-crazy

Shanghai's slumber is due partly to a more than week-long city extension

of the Lunar New Year holiday to help combat the virus.

That ends on Monday, but many businesses and government departments are planning to allow staff to work from home.

Shanghai has avoided the full or partial lockdowns seen in other parts of China.

But residents are largely complying with official directives—issued via mass text messages or over blaring public loudspeakers—to avoid going outside unless absolutely necessary.

When they do, pedestrians often move far to one side of the pavement to avoid other approaching residents.

The city's subway system, one of the world's longest, has made masks mandatory, as has nearly every business that remains open.

And few bat an eye any more at pausing for the ubiquitous temperature reading—a plastic thermometer gun aimed unnervingly at the forehead—when entering almost any public building.

For those stuck at home, the government has issued a steady stream of tips on things like home exercise or how to avoid being stressed by the prospect of a pneumonia-like death.

"Reduce your consumption of media reports that make people unhappy, thereby reducing your worries and troubles," one government circular said brightly.

But sheer boredom weighs on many.

"All I can say is that I'm sick of staying home!" said one social media

response to the government's stress-reduction post.

Clear weather that graced the city several days into the viral crisis briefly lured many stir-crazy citizens out for some sun.

But that prompted yet another government social media post.

"You cannot disinfect yourself by standing out in the sun," it said.

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