

China reports first COVID-19 deaths in more than a year

March 19 2022



A worker wearing a face shield and a mask to help protect from the coronavirus walks through a hotel used for people who worked at the 2022 Winter Paralympics to stay during a period of health quarantine, Saturday, March 19, 2022, in the Yanqing district of Beijing. Credit: AP Photo/Andy Wong

China's health authorities reported two COVID-19 deaths on Saturday,

the first since January 2021, as the country battles its worst outbreak in two years driven by a surge in the highly transmissible omicron variant.

The deaths, both in northeastern China's Jilin province, bring the country's coronavirus death toll to 4,638.

Both fatalities occurred in elderly patients and were the result of their underlying conditions, Jiao Yahui, an official with the National Health Commission, told a news briefing on Saturday. One of them had not been vaccinated for COVID-19, she said.

Three-fourths of the new 2,157 community transmissions reported Saturday came from Jilin. The province has imposed a travel ban, with people needing permission from police to travel across borders.

Nationwide, China has reported more than 29,000 cases since the beginning of March, including those without symptoms.

While China has explored easing its pandemic response, it has pressed on with [its tried-and-true policy of lockdowns](#) and mass testing of millions of people as part of a successful, if burdensome, "zero-COVID" strategy since the initial outbreak in Wuhan in 2019.

The country has seen relatively few infections from the virus so far because clusters are tamped down as quickly as they're discovered. The strategy has received popular support and prevented the large numbers of deaths seen in other countries, many of which have started to forgo any kind of social distancing measures.



Workers wearing face shields and masks to help protect from the coronavirus prepare to clear the snow outside a health quarantine hotel Saturday, March 19, 2022, in the Yanqing district of Beijing, as the capital city was hit by a snowstorm. Credit: AP Photo/Andy Wong



Workers wearing face shields and masks to help protect from the coronavirus clear the snow outside a health quarantine hotel Saturday, March 19, 2022, in the Yanqing district of Beijing, as the capital city was hit by a snowstorm. Credit: AP Photo/Andy Wong



Workers wearing face shields and masks to help protect from the coronavirus clear the snow on a road outside a health quarantine hotel Saturday, March 19, 2022, in the Yanqing district of Beijing, as the capital city was hit by a snowstorm. Credit: AP Photo/Andy Wong



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Faced with the worst surge since late 2019, officials have vowed to double down on the zero-tolerance strategy to contain multiple outbreaks across China. However, leader Xi Jinping acknowledged for the first time the burden of the measures on Thursday, saying that China should seek "maximum effect" with "minimum cost" in controlling the virus.

Hong Kong, which is facing its worst surge of the pandemic, recorded 16,583 new cases Saturday. The city's total coronavirus infections exceeded 1 million on Friday, and its number of deaths has already

surpassed mainland China's.

Mainland China's COVID-19 data is counted separately from Hong Kong, a special administrative region.

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