

# Anti-virus shutdowns in China spread as infections rise

April 14 2022, by Joe McDonald

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The skyline of Beijing is reflecting in the sunglasses of a woman wearing a face mask as she walks at a public park in Beijing, Thursday, April 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein

Anti-virus controls that have shut down some of China's biggest cities

and fueled public irritation are spreading as infections rise, hurting a weak economy and prompting warnings of possible global shockwaves.

Shanghai is easing rules that confined most of its 25 million people to their homes after complaints they had trouble getting food. But most of its businesses still are closed. Access to Guangzhou, an industrial center of 19 million people near Hong Kong, was suspended this week. Other cities are cutting off access or closing factories and schools.

Spring planting by Chinese farmers who feed 1.4 billion people might be disrupted, Nomura economists warned Thursday. That could boost demand for imported wheat and other food, pushing up already high global prices.

The closures are an embarrassment to the ruling Communist Party and a setback for official efforts to shore up slumping growth in the world's second-largest economy. They come during a sensitive year when President Xi Jinping is expected to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as leader.

Beijing has promised to reduce the human and economic cost of its "zero-COVID" strategy, but Xi on Wednesday ruled out joining the United States and other governments that are dropping restrictions and trying to live with the virus.



In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, workers clean and disinfect the floor of a makeshift hospital at the National Exhibition and Convention Center in Shanghai, Thursday, April 14, 2022. Anti-virus controls that shut down some of China's biggest cities and fueled public irritation are spreading as infections rise, hurting a weak economy and prompting warnings of possible global shockwaves. Credit: Ding Ting/Xinhua via AP

"Prevention and control work cannot be relaxed," Xi said, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. "Persistence is victory."

The risk that China might tumble into recession is increasing, Ting Lu, Jing Wang and Harrison Zhang of Nomura warned in a report.

"The logistics crunch is worsening," they said. "The markets should also



be concerned about the delayed spring planting of grain in China."

The government reported 29,411 new cases Thursday, all but 3,020 with no symptoms. Shanghai accounted for 95% of that total, or 27,719 cases. All but 2,573 had no symptoms.

A health official warned Wednesday that Shanghai didn't have the virus under control despite its easing restrictions.

Some 6.6 million people were allowed to leave their homes in areas that had no new cases for at least a week. But at least 15 million others still are barred from going outdoors.



In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, COVID-19 patients

leave a makeshift hospital at the National Exhibition and Convention Center in Shanghai, Thursday, April 14, 2022. Anti-virus controls that shut down some of China's biggest cities and fueled public irritation are spreading as infections rise, hurting a weak economy and prompting warnings of possible global shockwaves. Credit: Ding Ting/Xinhua via AP

Most people have obeyed despite grumbling about shortages of food, medicine and access to elderly relatives who need help. But videos on the popular Sina Weibo social media service show some trading punches with police.

Grape Chen, a data analyst in Shanghai, said she was panicking about getting medicines for her father, who is recovering from a stroke. She called police after getting no response from an official hotline but was told quarantine rules bar officers from helping.

"We are willing to cooperate with the country," Chen said. "But we also hope that our lives can be respected."

The city government of Suzhou, a center for smartphone manufacturing and other high-tech industry west of Shanghai, told its 18 million people to stay home when possible.

Taiyuan, a blue-collar city of 4 million in central China, suspended inter-city bus service, according to the official China News Service. Ningde in the southeast barred residents from leaving.



People wearing face masks walk near blossoming trees at a public park in Beijing, Thursday, April 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein

A restaurant cook in Taiyuan said his family has been confined to their apartment compound since April 3 after cases were found in neighboring compounds.

"Our lives will be seriously affected if the restrictions last long," said the cook, who would give only his surname, Chen.

"My wife and I are earning nothing," Chen said. "We have three children to support."

All but 13 of China's 100 biggest cities by economic output are under



some form of restrictions, according to Gavekal Dragonomics, a research firm.

"The intensity is increasing," Gavekal said in a report this week.

The volume of cargo handled by the Shanghai port, the world's busiest, has fallen 40%, according to an estimate by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China. Automakers have suspended production due to disruption in deliveries of supplies.



People wearing face masks walk near blossoming trees at a public park in Beijing, Thursday, April 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein

Restrictions on areas that produce the world's smartphones, consumer electronics and other goods are prompting forecasters to cut expectations for this year's economic growth to as low as 5%, down sharply from last year's 8.1% expansion.

The ruling party's target is 5.5%. Growth slid to 4% over a year earlier in the final quarter of 2021 after tighter official controls on debt triggered a collapse in home sales and construction, industries that support millions of jobs.

Even before the latest shutdowns, the ruling party was promising tax refunds and other help for entrepreneurs who generate wealth and jobs.

Premier Li Keqiang, the No. 2 leader and top economic official, called this week for "quicker rollout" of aid for businesses that face a "key juncture for survival," China News Service reported.





A woman wearing a face mask takes a photo of blossoming trees at a public park in Beijing, Thursday, April 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein

Under a strategy dubbed "dynamic clearing," authorities are trying to use more targeted measures to isolate neighborhoods instead of whole cities with populations bigger than some countries. But some local leaders are imposing more sweeping controls.

Shanghai leaders were criticized for trying to minimize economic damage by ordering testing but no shutdown once cases were found last month. A citywide shutdown was ordered with only a few hours' warning after case numbers soared.

That was in contrast to Shenzhen, a tech and finance center of 17.5

million people near Hong Kong that closed the city March 13 after an outbreak and ordered mass testing. It reopened a week later and business returned to normal.

Guangzhou has imitated Shenzhen. Most access to the city of 19 million was suspended Monday and mass testing ordered after 27 infections were found.



A man wearing a face mask walks past blossoming trees at a public park in Beijing, Thursday, April 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein





A woman wearing a face mask takes a photo of blossoming trees at a public park in Beijing, Thursday, April 14, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein





In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, COVID-19 patients leave a makeshift hospital at the National Exhibition and Convention Center in Shanghai, Thursday, April 14, 2022. Anti-virus controls that shut down some of China's biggest cities and fueled public irritation are spreading as infections rise, hurting a weak economy and prompting warnings of possible global shockwaves. Credit: Ding Ting/Xinhua via AP



In this image taken from video provided by Grape Chen, Grape Chen puts on goggles before heading out for a COVID-19 test as part of a mass coronavirus testing effort in Shanghai, China, Monday, April 4, 2022. Anti-virus controls that shut down some of China's biggest cities and fueled public irritation are spreading as infections rise, hurting a weak economy and prompting warnings of possible global shockwaves. Chen said she is panicking about being able to obtain medication for her father, who is recovering from a stroke. She called police after getting no response from an official hotline but was told quarantine rules prevented officers from helping. Credit: Grape Chen via AP

Li Guanyu, a 31-year-old woman in Guangzhou, said residents can leave her apartment compound only once every other day to buy food but stores are well-stocked.

"This happened a bit suddenly," said Li. "Maybe the Shanghai situation is so bad that Guangzhou started mass testing and lockdowns as soon as cases were discovered."

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