

Beijing expands mass testing as lockdown fears grow

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Beijing on Tuesday launched mass coronavirus testing for nearly all its 21 million residents, as fears grew that the Chinese capital may be placed under a strict lockdown like Shanghai.

Under its zero-COVID policy, China has used lockdowns, mass testing and [travel restrictions](#) to stamp out infections.

Its biggest city, Shanghai, has been almost entirely locked down for weeks, and the mass testing order in Beijing has sparked worries the capital will be placed under similar restrictions.

"Shanghai's situation has gone beyond everyone's imagination, and many people think it's absurd that a modern metropolis... has handled the situation like that," said Beijing [resident](#) Ms Zhao as she did her regular shopping at a supermarket.

"I believe our situation will not be as bad... but to be honest, we also bought some rice, noodles, grains and oil. We've made preparations for at least one to two weeks," the 35-year-old human resources professional told AFP.

Beijing has ordered residents of the 12 central districts home to most of its population to undergo three rounds of testing after dozens of infections were found in recent days.

The capital's most populous district, Chaoyang, was the first to order mass testing from Monday, with people waiting in long lines to be swabbed by [health workers](#) in protective gear.

Eleven more districts began testing on Tuesday.

The testing order for Chaoyang sparked panic buying on Sunday night, with residents lining up at supermarkets with full carts as [state media](#) tried to reassure the public there were plentiful supplies.

Beijing residents told AFP they feared a repeat of the sudden lockdown in Shanghai, where people have struggled to obtain food and [medical](#)

[care](#) for non-COVID conditions.

Some residential compounds have been sealed off in Chaoyang, much like parts of Shanghai.

One resident of the district, who declined to be identified for fear of reprisal, told AFP he felt "a little anxious" after fences were suddenly put up in his neighbourhood.

Residents in his building were ordered Monday night to stay home for at least 14 days after one neighbour tested positive.

"I'm worried that if we need medicine or other items in the future, we won't be able to get them delivered," he said.

Meanwhile, Beijing suspended large gatherings such as wedding banquets, closed theatres, and ordered a halt in home renovations as well as some [construction projects](#).

Multiple residents took to social media to lament the last-minute postponement of their weddings.

"I'll develop [psychological problems](#) if this goes on," wrote a woman who said she would have to delay her wedding, planned for the upcoming May national holiday—a popular time for couples tying the knot.

—Economic pressure—

The capital reported 33 new cases on Tuesday, a fraction of Shanghai's daily tally of 16,000.

But Beijing officials are anxious to avoid a spiralling outbreak.

They have urged companies to allow employees to work from home and suspended local group tourism ahead of the May national holiday.

Authorities have urged residents not to leave Beijing unless necessary and ordered the cancellation of sports events and exhibitions.

Beijing's measures are mild, however, compared with actions taken elsewhere, Pinpoint Asset Management chief economist Zhiwei Zhang said in a note.

"I am surprised that the government did not impose restrictive policies in Beijing as harshly and quickly as in other cities that experienced similar outbreaks in recent weeks," he wrote.

Authorities are increasingly struggling with the impact of strict zero-COVID protocols on the economy, especially when outbreaks appear in the country's most important cities.

Concerns have also grown about how China's COVID policies could impact the global economy, especially supply chains.

The city of Baotou in China's Inner Mongolia region—a major supplier of rare earths—said Monday that after the detection of two virus cases, all residents must stay home, with each household only sending one member out to buy necessities once a day.

That order came as Shanghai's lockdown dragged on, with 52 new COVID deaths reported Tuesday.

Social media users and local news shared images of green metal fences put up across the financial hub to keep residents confined to their buildings.

One viral image appeared to show fences along deserted pavements of a once-bustling street where restaurant patrons used to dine al fresco.

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