

Hong Kong urges testing, Shanghai struggles under lockdown

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Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, left, wears gloves before delivering package of coronavirus prevention materials to people during an anti-epidemic event in Hong Kong, Saturday, April 2, 2022. Hong Kong authorities on Saturday asked the entire population of more than 7.4 million people to voluntarily test themselves for COVID-19 at home for three days in a row starting next week. Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung

Hong Kong authorities on Saturday asked the entire population of more than 7.4 million people to voluntarily test themselves for COVID-19 at home for three days in a row starting next week.

The announcement by Chief Executive Carrie Lam came as the southern Chinese [city](#) is struggling to contain its worst outbreak with authorities sending mixed signals about testing and lockdowns.

Lam said a "compulsory, universal test" of the whole population is still essential, but did not say when that might happen. Authorities shelved the idea after a previous announcement caused panic buying.

The prospect of further school closures and other disruptions has the government caught between calls for loosening restrictions and Beijing's demand for an extreme "zero-COVID" approach mandating lockdowns and mass testing.

Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous territory, on Friday lifted a ban on residents returning aboard flights from nine countries where COVID-19 cases have surged, including Britain and the U.S.

Hong Kong reported another 5,820 cases Friday as the latest surge begins to taper off.

Meanwhile, in Shanghai to the north, [authorities are struggling](#) to meet requirements for a lockdown on many of the city's 26 million residents—the largest such undertaking by China since the virus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.



Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, center, wears a face shield before delivering package of coronavirus prevention materials to people during an anti-epidemic event in Hong Kong, Saturday, April 2, 2022. Hong Kong authorities on Saturday asked the entire population of more than 7.4 million people to voluntarily test themselves for COVID-19 at home for three days in a row starting next week. Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung

Shanghai is implementing a two-stage, eight-day lockdown, but many of those on the eastern, or Pudong, side of the city who should have been free to leave their compounds on Friday have remained in isolation.

Authorities have meanwhile placed the other half of the city, Puxi, under isolation with non-essential businesses and [public transport](#) brought to a stop and roads cleared of cars and people. A total of 14 million Puxi

residents were tested on Friday, according to [state media](#).

Residents under isolation complained of difficulty obtaining food, [household items](#) and medications, while beds and staff at isolation centers were reportedly insufficient for the number of asymptomatic patients and others being brought there for observation.

China detected another 2,086 confirmed cases on Saturday, including 260 in Shanghai, and 7,789 asymptomatic cases, of which 6,051 were in Shanghai. Total numbers of new cases have been near record highs for several days, but no new deaths have been reported since March 20, leaving China's total at 4,638. China has recorded a total of 153,232 cases, according to the National Health Commission.



In this photo released by China's Xinhua News Agency, people with mild and asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 quarantine at the Shanghai New International Expo Center in Shanghai, Friday, April 1, 2022. In Shanghai to the north, authorities are struggling to meet requirements for a lockdown on many of the city's 26 million residents—the largest such undertaking by China since the virus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019. Credit: Ding Ting/Xinhua via AP



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Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, left, holds a package of coronavirus prevention materials to be delivered to people during an anti-epidemic event in Hong Kong, Saturday, April 2, 2022. Hong Kong authorities on Saturday asked the entire population of more than 7.4 million people to voluntarily test themselves for COVID-19 at home for three days in a row starting next week. Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung



Workers deliver packages of coronavirus prevention materials to people during an anti-epidemic event in Hong Kong, Saturday, April 2, 2022. Hong Kong authorities on Saturday asked the entire population of more than 7.4 million people to voluntarily test themselves for COVID-19 at home for three days in a row starting next week. Credit: AP Photo/Kin Cheung

Compared to Wuhan in 2020, Shanghai has benefited from China's experience and is better prepared, even though the outbreak is wider in scale, Chen Erzhen, commander of the third contingent of medical teams dispatched to the city, was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua Daily newspaper.

That's because the omicron BA.2 variant is more infectious though less virulent, leading to the large number of asymptomatic cases, which

China has categorized separately from "confirmed" cases.

"There is more pressure because the larger number of patients increases the task of controlling the outbreak," Chen said. "But at present, Shanghai's situation is under control and we'll continue to treat and isolate as necessary."

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