

Shanghai eases 2-week shutdown, letting some residents out

April 12 2022, by Joe McDonald



Deliverymen wearing protective suits carry bags of food at the gate of a residential community in Shanghai, China, Monday, April 11, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Many residents in the city of 26 million have been confined to their homes for up to three weeks as China maintains its "zero-COVID" strategy of handling outbreaks with strict isolation and mass testing. Credit: AP Photo

Some residents of Shanghai were allowed out of their homes as the city of 25 million eased a two-week-old shutdown Tuesday after videos posted online showed what was said to be people who ran out of food breaking into a supermarket and shouting appeals for help.

About 6.6 million people will be allowed to leave their homes, but some must stay in their own neighborhoods, according to the online news outlet The Paper. The government said some markets and pharmacies also would reopen.

The abrupt closure of most businesses and orders to stay home left the public fuming about a lack of access to food and medicine. People who test positive for the virus are forced into sprawling temporary quarantine facilities criticized by some as crowded and unsanitary.

Meanwhile, the American government announced all "non-emergency U.S. government employees" would be withdrawn from its Shanghai Consulate. A foreign ministry spokesman defended China's handling of the outbreak and accused Washington of politicizing its evacuation.

The unusual severity of Shanghai's shutdown starting March 28 appeared to be driven as much by politics as by public health concerns.

The struggle in China's richest city is an embarrassment during a politically sensitive year when President Xi Jinping is expected to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as leader of the ruling Communist Party.



People stand on a rooftop at a residential community in Shanghai, China, Monday, April 11, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Many residents in the city of 26 million have been confined to their homes for up to three weeks as China maintains its "zero-COVID" strategy of handling outbreaks with strict isolation and mass testing. Credit: AP Photo

China's case numbers are relatively low, but the ruling party is enforcing a "zero-tolerance" strategy that has suspended access to major cities to isolate every infected person. Some local officials were fired after being accused of failing to act aggressively enough.

The government reported 24,659 new cases through midnight Monday, including 23,387 with no symptoms. That included 23,346 in Shanghai,

only 998 of whom had symptoms.

In Shanghai, more than 200,000 cases but no deaths have been reported in the latest wave of infections.

The government eased restrictions by announcing residents of areas with no cases for at least two weeks can leave their homes starting Tuesday. It said they could go to any other area that also had no new cases during that time but were urged to stay home when possible.



A man looks at his smartphone on a balcony in a residential community in Shanghai, China, Monday, April 11 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Many residents in the city of 26 million have been confined to their homes for up to three weeks as China maintains its "zero-

COVID" strategy of handling outbreaks with strict isolation and mass testing.
Credit: AP Photo

Such "prevention areas" have about 4.8 million people, The Paper reported, citing city officials. It said all but 500,000 of those were in less densely crowded suburbs.

An additional 1.8 million people in "control areas" with no new cases in the past week are allowed out but can't leave their neighborhoods, the report said.

Another 15 million people in "quarantine areas" that have had infections in the past week still are barred from leaving their homes. The report gave no indication of the status of the remaining 3.4 million people in the official population.

The abrupt shutdown caught Shanghai households by surprise and prompted complaints they were left without access to food or medicine and were unable to look after elderly relatives who lived alone.

The government distributed packages of vegetables and other food for a few days at least twice to some households. Others said they received nothing.



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, a worker in protective clothing walks past a banner reading "Persistence is victory!" at a makeshift hospital and quarantine facility at the National Exhibition and Convention Center in Shanghai, Monday, April 11, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Credit: Ding Ting/Xinhua via AP

A video that circulated online Saturday showed what the caption said were people in the Songjiang district breaking into a supermarket and carrying away cartons of food.

Another showed people thrusting their fists into the air in front of what appeared to be government employees wearing hooded white protective suits. A third showed what it said were apartment dwellers, barred from

going outside, shouting appeals for help out their windows.

The Associated Press was unable to find the source of the videos or verify when and where they were shot. The supermarket video was labeled with an account number from China's popular Sina Weibo social media service, but the video doesn't appear on that account.

The ruling party requires Chinese social media operators to enforce censorship and remove videos and other postings about banned topics. Social media and online bulletin boards are filled with complaints about the Shanghai shutdown and appeals for food or medicine. It is unclear how many others might have been deleted.



People wearing face masks walk along a road inside a residential community in Shanghai, China, Monday, April 11, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-

emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Many residents in the city of 26 million have been confined to their homes for up to three weeks as China maintains its "zero-COVID" strategy of handling outbreaks with strict isolation and mass testing. Credit: AP Photo

Complaints about food shortages began after Shanghai closed segments of the city on March 28.

Plans called for four-day closures of districts while residents were tested. That changed to an indefinite citywide shutdown after case numbers soared. Shoppers who got little warning stripped supermarket shelves.

City officials apologized publicly and promised to improve food supplies. Despite that, residents said online grocers often sold out early in the day or were unable to deliver. Online commerce companies said they added hundreds of employees to increase deliveries.

The State Department last week advised Americans against travel to China due to "arbitrary enforcement" of local laws and anti-virus restrictions. It cited a risk of "parents and children being separated."

On Tuesday, a State Department statement said the U.S. government decided "it is best for our employees and their families to be reduced in number" due to "changing circumstances on the ground."



Volunteers wearing armbands and face masks stand at the gate of a residential community in Shanghai, China, Monday, April 11, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Many residents in the city of 26 million have been confined to their homes for up to three weeks as China maintains its "zero-COVID" strategy of handling outbreaks with strict isolation and mass testing. Credit: AP Photo



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, bunk beds are seen at a makeshift hospital and quarantine facility at the National Exhibition and Convention Center in Shanghai, Monday, April 11, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Credit: Ding Ting/Xinhua via AP



Commuters wearing face masks walk across an intersection in the central business district in Beijing, Tuesday, April 12, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein



A man wearing a face mask waits at a bus stop in Beijing, Tuesday, April 12, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein



A commuter wearing a face mask walks at an office complex in Beijing, Tuesday, April 12, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein



Commuters wearing face masks walk out of a subway station in the central business district in Beijing, Tuesday, April 12, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein



A crossing guard wearing a face mask directs a bicyclist at an intersection in Beijing, Tuesday, April 12, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein



Commuters wearing face masks ride a subway train in Beijing, Tuesday, April 12, 2022. The U.S. has ordered all non-emergency consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a tight lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein

A foreign ministry spokesman criticized the announcement and said China's anti-virus work is "scientific and effective."

"The United States should immediately stop attacking China's epidemic prevention policy, stop political manipulation with the epidemic issue and stop smearing and discrediting China," said the spokesman, Zhao Lijian.

AP video producer Liu Zheng contributed.

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Citation: Shanghai eases 2-week shutdown, letting some residents out (2022, April 12) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-04-shanghai-eases-week-shutdown-residents.html>

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