

Relief, caution in Beijing as city lifts COVID dine-in curbs

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After staying home for more than a month, Chen Chunmei joined a long line of customers at a popular Beijing restaurant where diners tucked into massive bowls of crayfish following an easing of COVID

restrictions in the Chinese capital.

Last month, the city of 22 million stopped people from eating out, closed gyms and sealed off dozens of subway stations to try and stamp out a [coronavirus outbreak](#).

The curbs are now finally easing, including at restaurants.

"I'm very excited, mainly because we'd been sealed off for so long," Chen told AFP.

"I've been ordering takeout or cooking every day. I really wanted to come out for meals."

At its peak, Beijing logged just dozens of infections every day.

But authorities in China are committed to a zero-COVID strategy—using rapid lockdowns, mass testing and severe travel restrictions to eliminate even the smallest outbreaks.

Chen, 28, said her compound was initially locked down for two weeks but when she was finally allowed to leave, the nearby subway station was closed.

"Since then, I'd been staying at home," she said. "At first I thought working from home was pretty good but after a while, I got bored."

As Beijing's case numbers fell—it reported just two local asymptomatic infections on Tuesday—authorities told residents they could return to work this week, while schools would reopen from June 13.

The Universal Beijing resort said it will reopen on June 15, while Chinese media reported that cinemas and gyms will run at 75 percent

capacity from this week in most areas.

Dine-ins at restaurants have also mostly resumed, although two districts still have restrictions in place because of recent COVID cases.

'Losing money'

While authorities have persisted with their zero-COVID policy, its [economic costs](#) have piled up.

Businesses in Beijing told AFP that the last month bit a large chunk out of their earnings.

"Our revenue for the month of May fell around 65 percent on-year," said Zhang Shengtao, operations director at Beijing Huda Catering.

He added that staff income at the restaurant chain, which employs nearly 800 people, also dropped by around 30 percent last month.

Some breathed a sigh of relief on Monday as restrictions on dining-in were eased.

"I've been longing for the resumption," said Wu Ziwen, a manager at restaurant chain Nanjing Dapaidang.

"There's no doubt that we were losing money," he told AFP, adding that the outlet has been relying on food deliveries to survive.

The dine-in resumption in Beijing is still partial, however: due to COVID controls, his restaurant can only accept up to 50 percent of regular capacity "even if customers flood in," Wu said.

Beijing is requiring people to produce a negative test done within three

days if they want to take [public transport](#) or enter [office buildings](#).

The outbreak in the capital has also kept visitors like 33-year-old Sun Tao from returning home to Shanxi.

The dine-in relaxation gave him some respite.

"I'm nervous and alert," said Sun, who ventured out of the hotel where he was staying with his wife on Monday evening and waited for a table at a [restaurant](#).

"But I also wanted to feel my tastebuds again."

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