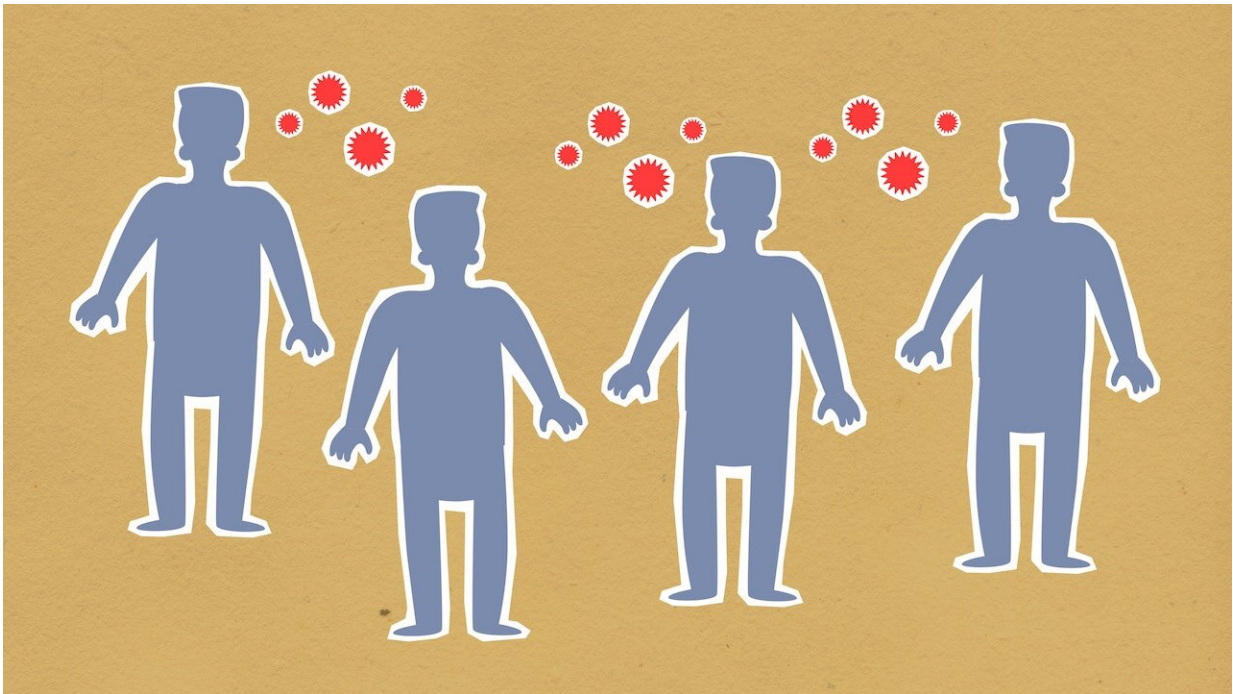


China back to 'normal' after end of COVID curbs: official

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China has returned to normal after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, Vice Premier Liu He told the World Economic Forum on Tuesday as he invited "international friends" to visit the country.

China abruptly dropped its "zero-COVID" approach last month after three years of enforcing some of the harshest anti-pandemic restrictions

in the world.

The move led to a wave of infections that packed hospitals and overwhelmed crematoriums, with authorities revealing Saturday that almost 60,000 COVID-related deaths were reported in just over a month.

But Liu told the meeting of the global elite in the Swiss Alpine village of Davos that the transition "has overall been stable and smooth".

"The time to reach the peak (of infections) and to return to normal has been relatively fast. In some senses, it has exceeded our expectations," he said.

Liu said the food and [beverage industry](#) and tourism had started to return to normal, with five billion trips expected during China's Lunar New Year holiday that begins this weekend.

"Things have comprehensively returned to normal," he said.

"Currently the main difficulty is still the elderly, those with underlying conditions," he said, adding: "We are currently striving to tackle this."

Millions of the elderly in China are not fully vaccinated, with President Xi Jinping's government criticized for not prioritizing immunization campaigns among the country's most vulnerable citizens.

Liu also encouraged foreigners to visit China after quarantine requirements for overseas arrivals were dropped last week.

"We very much welcome international friends to come to China. We will provide the best service. Of course, right now, on some issues we need some time to transition, but on the whole, there is already no problem,"

he said.

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