

US to relax COVID testing rules for travelers from China

March 8 2023, by AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER



Residents wait to cross a road near members of the Chaoyang militia on duty in Beijing, Monday, March 6, 2023. Chinese economic officials expressed confidence Monday they can meet this year's growth target of "around 5%" by generating 12 million new jobs and encouraging consumer spending following the end of anti-virus controls that kept millions of people at home. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan

The Biden administration is preparing to relax [COVID-19 testing restrictions for travelers from China](#) as soon as Friday, according to two people familiar with the decision.

The people, who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the administration has decided to roll back the testing requirements as cases, hospitalizations and deaths are declining in China and the U.S. has gathered better information about the surge.

The restrictions were put in place on Dec. 28 and took effect on Jan. 5 amid a surge in infections in China after the nation sharply eased pandemic restrictions and as U.S. health officials expressed concerns that their Chinese counterparts were not being truthful to the world about the true number of infections and deaths. The Washington Post was first to report on Tuesday about the expected administration move.

At the time, U.S. officials also said the restriction was necessary to protect U.S. citizens and communities because there was a lack of transparency from the Chinese government about the size of the surge or the variants that were circulating within China.

As part of its response, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention earlier this year expanded genomic surveillance at several U.S. airports, collecting voluntary samples from passengers aboard hundreds of weekly flights from China, and the testing of wastewater aboard airplanes. The Traveler-based Genomic Surveillance Program will continue to monitor travelers from China and more than 30 other countries.

The rules imposed in January require travelers to the U.S. from China, Hong Kong and Macau to take a COVID-19 test no more than two days before travel and provide a negative test before boarding their flight. The testing applies to anyone 2 years and older, including U.S. citizens.

It also applied to people traveling from China via a third country and to people connecting through the U.S. as they go on to other destinations. Anyone testing positive more than 10 days before the flight can provide documentation showing they've recovered from COVID-19 instead of a negative test result.

It has been left to the airlines to confirm negative tests and documentation of recovery before passengers board.

China saw infections and deaths surge after it eased back from its "zero COVID" strategy in early December after rare public protests against a policy that confined millions of people to their homes and sparked protests and demands for President Xi Jinping to resign.

But as China eased its strict rules, infections and deaths surged, and parts of the country for weeks saw their hospitals [overwhelmed by infected patients](#) looking for help. Still, the Chinese government has been slow to release data on the number of deaths and infections.

The U.S. decision to lift restrictions comes at a moment when U.S.-China relations are strained. Biden ordered a Chinese spy balloon shot down last month after it traversed the continental United States. The Biden administration has also publicized U.S. intelligence findings that raise concern Beijing is weighing providing Russia weaponry for its ongoing war on Ukraine.

Earlier Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang warned that Beijing and Washington were headed for "conflict and confrontation" if the U.S. doesn't change course.

Qin's comments came a day after Xi in an unusually pointed speech said that "Western countries led by the United States have implemented all-round containment, encirclement and suppression of China."

White House officials sought to downplay the hot rhetoric from Beijing.

"There is no change to the United States' posture when it comes to this bilateral relationship," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said. "The president believes those tensions obviously have to be recognized, but can be worked through."

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