

## CHINA

# Lockdown in Xi'an not yet ready for end

Zero transmission to be achieved when close contacts are the only infections

By ZHENG CAIXIONG  
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The lockdown in Xi'an will be lifted only when all COVID-19 patients outside quarantine have been cleared, according to a senior disease control and prevention official from the Shaanxi provincial capital. Chen Zhijun, deputy director of the Xi'an center for disease control and prevention, said zero transmission in society indicates all newly confirmed cases are detected only among the patients' close contacts and second close contacts who have been placed under quarantine or isolated for medical observation.

The city, which has a population of 13 million, was put under lockdown on Dec 23.

According to statistics revealed by the Shaanxi provincial health commission on Tuesday, the province reported 95 locally transmitted COVID-19 cases on Monday, bringing the province's total to 1,785. All the new cases were detected in Xi'an.

Chen urged more effective measures to prevent and control the spread of the coronavirus in local communities, particularly in the urban villages with high population density.

"It is difficult to ensure that there is not any contact among residents in the urban villages. Therefore, the coronavirus will spread through the public venues, including elevators and lifts in high-rise buildings, if no effective and concrete measures are introduced to block the spread in such villages," Chen said.

"After several rounds of mass nucleic acid testing campaigns and the introduction of effective and concrete measures, the rapid spread of the coronavirus in local communities has been put under control," Ma Guanghui, deputy director of the Shaanxi Provincial Health Commission, said at a news conference on Tuesday.

The province reported 122 confirmed cases on Saturday, 90 on Sunday and 95 on Monday, compared with more than 150 cases several days in a row previously, according to Ma.



Residents shop for groceries at a makeshift outdoor market in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Tuesday. YUAN JINGZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Short-distance trips top choice for New Year's Day holiday tourists

By CHENG SI  
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Due to increasing awareness of COVID-19 containment measures, short-distance tours were the main choice for Chinese travelers over the recent New Year's Day holiday, according to travel agencies.

Data cited by agencies show that some first-tier cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, witnessed their attractions reach beyond local residents to people from neighboring provinces. Ski resorts were preferred by those taking day trips or short-distance tours over the three-day break.

Trip.com Group, an online travel agency, said that most of its users went on short-distance trips over the holiday, with nearly 60 percent of them traveling within their own provinces.

Overall, the number of patients detected has shown a downward trend after great efforts were made and effective measures taken."

Ma Guanghui, deputy director of the Shaanxi Provincial Health Commission

"Overall, the number of patients detected has shown a downward trend after great efforts were made and effective measures taken," he said.

Lyu Yongpeng, deputy director of Xi'an health commission, said the new 52 male and 43 female patients detected in Xi'an included three children under the age of 3 and six over 60.

As of Tuesday noon, 18 patients have been discharged from hospitals, Lyu said, adding Xi'an started a new round of mass nucleic acid testing at 9 am on Tuesday.

According to Liu Hongchun, deputy director of the Shaanxi Provincial Bureau of Finance, the central government and governments at all levels in the province have invested more than 2.82 billion yuan (\$440 million) to help fight this most recent outbreak.

Liu said the province's finance departments would expand investments to ensure adequate supplies of anti-pandemic materials, food and other daily necessities.

Separately, Henan province reported five confirmed domestic cases in Zhengzhou, Xuchang and Luoyang cities, as well as 19 asymptomatic cases on Monday, the provincial health commission said on Tuesday. Local authorities have been mobilized to contain the new outbreak.

Kang Ruoming contributed to this story.



Emergency personnel look for survivors in the rubble of a construction site in Bijie, Guizhou province, on Tuesday, after a landslide hit. YANG WENBIN / XINHUA

## 14 killed, 3 hurt after landslide hits construction site

By YANG JUN in Guiyang and ZHANG XIAOMIN

Fourteen people died as a landslide struck a hospital construction site on Monday evening in Bijie, Guizhou province, the city's information office announced on Tuesday.

The landslide, comprising an estimated 30,000 cubic meters of earth and 5,000 cu m of rock, hit the site of a branch of the Bijie's First People's Hospital at around 7 pm, trapping 17 people.

As of 2 pm on Tuesday, all 17 peo-



ple had been found. Fourteen had died, and three were injured. The injured were hospitalized in stable condition.

Guizhou's fire and rescue department sent emergency personnel

and equipment from Guiyang and Liupanshui to help with rescue efforts.

According to news website ThePaper.cn, the department sent 57 vehicles, 189 people, seven dogs, two life detectors, 16 excavators, two cranes and other personnel, vehicles and equipment to the scene of the rescue.

The Ministry of Emergency Management also sent staff to the scene to guide the rescue.

Through the coordination of emergency, fire, health, public security and other departments, more

than 1,000 people participated in the rescue work.

Investigation into the cause of the landslide is underway.

Previous sources from the information office of Bijie's Jinhaihu New Area show that with an investment of 2 billion yuan (\$313 million), the Jinhaihu Branch of Bijie's First People's Hospital will become the largest hospital in the city. It was expected to be put into operation at the end of last year.

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## Hong Kong to create 'vaccine bubble'

By LI BINGCUN and YU CHENYE in Hong Kong

Starting from Feb 24, people entering designated venues, such as restaurants and schools, will be required to present proof of COVID-19 vaccination, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government announced on Tuesday.

The "vaccine bubble" arrangement aims to further increase the city's vaccination rate and provide more public health safeguards, Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor told reporters.

The announcement was made as Hong Kong has recorded more than 100 Omicron cases, mostly imported. Omicron is a variant of COVID-19 that has exacerbated the ongoing pandemic.

Speaking before the Executive Council meeting on Tuesday, Lam said the new arrangement will cover not only premises under the city's Prevention and Control of Disease Regulation, such as restaurants and bars, but also schools, museums and libraries. Private offices, malls and cinemas will not be included.

Under the bubble arrangement, those who have received at least one vaccine dose can enter regulated

venues by showing proof. Those who don't offer proof will be denied entry.

The rule does not apply to people who are not eligible for vaccination, such as children aged under 12. In fact, whether such entry requirements will apply only to staff or all people entering each site is still under discussion, Lam said.

She added that for schools, the arrangement may first apply to teachers and other staff, but not students.

In terms of government buildings, authorities announced earlier that starting from mid-February, all government employees must present proof of COVID-19 vaccination.

Lam also noted that since the government revealed the bubble plan, more residents have been getting vaccinated.

On Monday, nearly 18,000 people received their first COVID-19 shots. For a while, there were only 1,000 to 2,000 people getting the jab each day, Lam said. Now, about 73 percent of the city's population has received at least one dose of the vaccine.

Wong Kwan-yu, president of the Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, said he believes the bubble arrangement could help increase the vaccination rate of teachers and

eligible students, and promote full school resumption.

He noted that as the vaccination rate of such students has failed to meet required targets, some schools are still not able to resume full-time, face-to-face classes. The new arrangement, starting with the entry permit of school staff, could help encourage more eligible students to get jabbed if authorities determine they are required to, Wong reckoned.

Wong noted that most Hong Kong teachers have gotten at least one vaccine dose. He urged more students to get vaccinated soon to resume normal study activities.

Respiratory specialist Leung Chi-chiu, a member of the Medical Council of Hong Kong, said he thinks the new measure will have a positive effect on the overall inoculation rate, but he worries that there won't be enough time for all 2 million unvaccinated Hong Kong residents to get jabbed before the bubble rules take effect.

As more details are still being discussed, he suggested the government collect more opinions to improve the arrangement.

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### Briefly

#### 80 trains organized for Games travelers

Railway authorities will arrange 80 bullet train services every day along the Beijing-Zhangjiakou High-speed Railway to provide commuting services for the upcoming Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games, operator China State Railway Group said on Tuesday. More services will be provided during the opening and closing ceremonies, the group said. The trains will shuttle participants, including athletes, media representatives and staff members, among the Games areas — Beijing's downtown area, its suburban Yanqing district and Hebei province's Chongli district in Zhangjiakou.

#### Fewer smokers aged 15 and up in Beijing

The smoking rate among those aged 15 and above in Beijing has dropped to 19.9 percent, data from the capital's health commission showed on Tuesday. The number of smokers in this age group has decreased by 73,000 from that in 2019. The rate of exposure to secondhand smoke in workplaces and restaurants has declined to 23.4 percent and 37.3 percent, respectively, compared to 27 percent and 42.5 percent in 2019. The capital has prohibited smoking in public spaces since June 1, 2015, when the regulations on tobacco control took effect.

#### Railway passengers to top 3 billion in '22

China's railway operator said on Tuesday that it expects to dispatch around 3.04 billion passengers in 2022, up 20 percent year-on-year. Goods delivered by rail are forecast to grow 2.1 percent year-on-year to reach over 3.8 billion metric tons, the China State Railway Group said at its annual conference. The railway operator will accomplish its investment targets and advance key national projects, such as the Sichuan-Tibet Railway, to a high-quality standard, it said. Over 3,300 kilometers of railways will be put into production this year, according to the operator.