

POLICY REVIEW

Cabinet ramps up COVID-19 testing

Premier says increasing capacity and speed are crucial measures in pandemic containment process

By XU WEI
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The State Council has pledged to bolster China's COVID-19 testing capacity and develop technologies that can produce more accurate results more quickly as the country braces for a possible spike in infections in autumn and winter.

Improving testing capacity will be a key measure in coordinating epidemic containment and socioeconomic development, the Cabinet said after its executive meeting on Wednesday.

It pledged to mobilize the strength of various sectors to speed up the development of testing kits, especially those that are easier to operate, and to accelerate training for staff at testing laboratories. It added that testing capacity must be reasonably distributed in different areas and the number of mobile labs must be increased.

The Cabinet has also set a target of ensuring that testing services can be offered at all top-tier hospitals and infectious diseases hospitals, saying that at least one public hospital in each county across the nation must be able to conduct tests. Authorities at all levels must beef up funding support for testing, it added.

Premier Li Keqiang said at the meeting that, in addition to mask wearing and social distancing, strengthening the country's testing capacity is a crucial measure in the pandemic containment process, and testing kits that can deliver more accurate and quicker results are essential for the early detection of infections.

Officials and experts have warned of a possible spike in the pandemic in autumn and winter, when respiratory infectious diseases are more prone to spreading in clusters.

Wang Hesheng, deputy head of the National Health Commission, told a news briefing on July 28 that the country is gearing up for a possible rebound of the pandemic, including steps to raise the capacity and quality of nucleic acid testing.

China has flattened the curve of the pandemic despite recent spikes in cases in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and Dalian, Liaoning province.

The country increased the number of medical institutions offering nucleic acid tests from 2,081 in March to 4,804 by the end of June, when 3.78 million tests could be conducted a day, double the number in March, the National Health Commission said.

A document issued by the commission last month stipulates that fever clinics must report testing results in six hours, while results for tests conducted on patients at hospitals must be delivered in 12 hours. For individuals who voluntarily undergo testing, institutions must report the results in 24 hours.

The document also called for local authorities to step up training for staff at testing agencies and enable the universal recognition of results to avoid repeat testing.



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Wu Ming, a professor of public health policy and administration at Peking University, said targeted testing measures and effective contact tracing have enabled the country to quickly contain fresh outbreaks.

"Preparedness averts peril," she said. "Our knowledge of the novel coronavirus remains incomplete, and we need to ramp up our testing strength to prepare for worse-case scenarios."

Wu added that some areas could lack sufficient qualified personnel if large-scale testing is required, and the problem could be solved by increasing the number of mobile testing centers.

The latest policy has offered another significant boost to the many biotech companies who are researching testing technologies.

Dai Lizhong, the chairman of San-

sure Biotech in Changsha, Hunan province, and also a National People's Congress deputy, said an integral part of improving testing technology for COVID-19 is to allow tests to be conducted outside professional labs and to meet the demand emerging in different scenarios, such as at customs posts, airports and grassroots institutions.

Dai's company released a diagnostic

system for the coronavirus on Thursday that does not require a professional laboratory and gives a test result within 15 to 45 minutes.

He said the latest Cabinet policy will significantly bolster the testing capacity at primary-level medical institutions and create a strong pillar of infrastructure and technological strength to help contain major disease outbreaks in the future.

POLICY RESPONSE

Round-the-clock dike patrols to guarantee safety

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A number of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for flood control and drought relief, housing and urban-rural development, and human resources and social security, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

Patrols of dikes and sluices stepped up amid floods

China will strengthen the patrolling of dikes and sluices around the Yangtze River, Huai River and Taihu Lake to ensure safety during flood prevention work.

The Office of State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters called for the creation of detailed patrol plans that include round-the-clock patrols of the main dikes and sluices on rivers and lakes.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Emergency Management said it will continue to dispatch rescue teams and allocate supplies to flood-hit regions for disaster relief.

Earlier, the ministries of emergency management and finance earmarked 30 million yuan (\$4.3 million) for rescue efforts in hard-hit Hubei province.



Central bank, ministries urge lower company costs

The People's Bank of China and three ministries, including the National Development and Reform Commission, have issued a plan detailing major tasks to lower companies' costs this year, and have called for a number of other ministries and local authorities to coordinate their efforts to accomplish the tasks.

According to a notice released on July 28, policies that have reduced value-added tax for small businesses and those that waive VAT for services such as public transportation, hotel and tourism will be extended to the end of this year.

The authorities should also carefully implement policies issued this year, including those that reduce or waive civil aviation development fund and port construction fees.

The notice also set a goal of reducing the cost of broadband access for enterprises by an average of 15 percent.

The authorities have been told to strengthen financial support for the real economy and continue to lower institutional costs through efforts such as relaxing market entry restrictions and streamlining administrative procedures.

Other costs for companies that need to be lowered include rents, electricity charges and logistics expenses, according to the notice.

Guideline backs 'smart construction industry'

The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and 12 other departments have issued a guideline to promote development of a "smart construction industry".

The guideline, released on July 28, aims to upgrade the construction industry with digital and intelligent technologies and make it a more powerful driving force to increase domestic demand.

It set a goal for China to make the industry significantly more industrialized, digitalized and intelligent by 2025 and to become a competitive country in terms of

intelligent construction by 2035.

Local authorities should speed up the upgrading of the industry by measures including promoting prefabricated buildings and applying more innovative technologies such as big data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and blockchain in the construction process.

They should speed up innovation by measures including developing key technologies and working on application of construction robots featuring functions such as man-machine coordination and interaction and self learning, according to the guideline.

They should also nurture general contractors able to offer intelligent solutions and encourage companies to work closely and innovate together.

The construction industry should apply intelligent technologies to increase efficiency and reduce waste and the consumption of energy, water and other materials, the notice said, adding that it should also promote waste recycling.

Human resources agencies mobilized for job creation

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has issued a notice asking local human resources authori-

ties to mobilize the human resources service sector to boost employment.

The notice said the authorities should encourage human resources service agencies to create better online recruitment platforms to meet the needs of various kinds of job seekers.

They should also support the agencies in holding everyday and offline recruitment activities while fully implementing disease prevention measures.

The notice called on the authorities to encourage agencies to focus on companies that are producing key medical supplies, operating public facilities or carrying out other important projects, and offer them services such as recruiting, talent seeking, labor dispatching and employee training.

The authorities should guide the agencies to offer services such as employee management, salary management and development planning to companies hit hard by COVID-19, especially micro-sized, small and medium-sized companies.

They should also support the agencies in promoting employment of college graduates and migrant workers, the notice said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Policy digest

More support for migrant workers



The State Council decided to further support the employment of migrant workers at an executive meeting on Wednesday.

Local authorities should take effective measures to create more jobs for migrant workers and guarantee jobs for those who live in an urban area for most of the year, the meeting was told.

They should also work vigorously to develop service sectors related to daily life and labor-intensive sectors, and implement more favorable policies for companies that hire more migrant workers.

The State Council called for the government to support migrant workers wanting to find jobs near their homes and to expand employment through measures such as developing infrastructure projects.

It also asked governments to pay more to laborers from poor families who work in government-aid infrastructure projects.

Migrant workers who have started their own business for the first time and have had the business up and running for at least six months can be granted half their startup business subsidies in advance, the meeting was told.

The government should also step up efforts to ensure that impoverished people can find jobs, it heard.

Flexible employment to be encouraged

The State Council's General Office has issued a guideline to provide more favorable policies for various types of flexible employment.

The guideline, released on Friday, said local governments and State Council departments should encourage sole proprietorship and provide more convenient counseling and registration services.

They should encourage people to start low-risk small businesses that can produce a profit in a short time and are easy to transform, the guideline said.

It called on the authorities to create more part-time jobs in sectors including cleaning, sales, construction and decoration and strengthen support for part-time workers, the guideline said.

They should also speed up the development of the online economy in sectors such as sales, training, healthcare and entertainment, so that more people can work at home, it said.

The guideline called on the authorities to closely follow the development of society and the economy as well as new trends in the internet industry and update the classification of occupations to include new jobs.

The authorities need to guide the development of newly emerged occupations such as livestream sales and the delivery of online orders, form standards and design training courses for the occupations, it said.

The guideline said the authorities should provide training courses for people who want to work flexibly to help them start and operate their own businesses.

The authorities should also provide better human resources services for employers and job seekers who need flexible employment and guarantee the rights of employees, it said.

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