

**Coronavirus pandemic**

## Beijing running out of fever medication as Covid outbreak spreads

Hospitals ration supplies and long queues form at testing centres as China relaxes restrictions



Covid-19 prevention workers receive new protective equipment in Beijing on Thursday. Local media has advised patients to stay home as authorities try to reserve hospital beds for serious cases © Thomas Peter/Reuters

**Ryan McMorrow** and **Nian Liu** in Beijing and **Sun Yu** in New York 4 HOURS AGO

Beijing is running out of medical supplies as the Chinese capital combats a rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak, health workers said, putting stress on limited resources just as authorities lift pandemic restrictions.

Clinics designated for Covid-19 patients are quickly filling up and some hospitals in the city of 22mn people have begun rationing ibuprofen and paracetamol. Residents of Chaoyang, the district at the centre of Beijing's Covid outbreak, have emptied chemists' shelves of fever-reducing medicine and rapid antigen tests, staff at multiple pharmacies told the FT.

"We have a child with a high fever but all the pharmacies are out of ibuprofen," said a Beijing resident surnamed Lin. "It came too fast, we didn't have time to prepare."

Beijing is facing its first big coronavirus wave just as Chinese leaders have begun loosening zero-Covid controls. China's cabinet on Wednesday [formally allowed](#) home quarantine for asymptomatic and mild patients, a sign that the country's system of lockdowns, enforced quarantine in state-run facilities, mass testing and contact tracing had failed to contain proliferating outbreaks.

New modelling [revealed by the Financial Times](#) this week showed that as many as

1mn people could die in the country in a “winter wave” in the coming months.

Tens of millions of Chinese are expected to travel home during next month’s lunar new year holiday, [raising the risk of spreading the virus](#) from large urban centres to unprotected rural villages.

Most of the country’s 1.4bn people have never been infected and have received China’s domestically produced vaccines, which [offer inferior protection](#) to foreign-made jabs with messenger RNA technology.

On Thursday evening, lines were forming at pharmacy doors throughout Chaoyang as Beijingers tried to stock up on medical supplies. “If you’re lining up for fever reducers — ibuprofen — we don’t have any,” shouted one pharmacist to a line of a dozen people waiting in near freezing temperatures.

Emergency departments in Beijing are already reporting an influx of Covid patients, whom the city is trying to funnel through 94 designated clinics and hospitals. Peking Union Medical College Hospital, one of the country’s top-ranked medical facilities, has converted its employee gym into a dialysis centre for end-stage kidney disease patients who have tested positive for the virus.

“Fever clinics are a total mess,” said a Beijing doctor, who was advising patients to stay at home instead of seeking medical treatment. That message is also being carried by local media as authorities try to reserve the city’s limited hospital beds for patients with serious cases.

A person briefed on the situation at one of the fever clinics said it was being overrun with patients and running short of doctors. “The hospital is sending doctors from other departments to work shifts at the fever clinic,” the person said. “Everyone is working 24 hours straight, resting for 24 hours, then returning for another shift.”

A study last year by the Peking University School of Public Health warned that the capital was unprepared for such a Covid wave. The study found that Beijing had about 500 doctors specialised in treating fevers, which it said was “too low”.

The city on Thursday reported 4,338 new Covid cases for the previous day. That figure was fewer than the total for Tuesday but came as the rate of testing slowed and residents turned to at-home rapid tests, which are not included in the city’s case tally.

At Beijing’s Civil Aviation General Hospital, the queue to enter the fever clinic extended into the parking lot. “We’ve been waiting for two hours,” said one person with a fever.

Ma Han, 28, said he had relied on friends to find medicine and antigen testing kits after his wife developed a fever on Monday. “I looked at all the delivery platforms — Meituan, Ele.me, JD — they either don’t have anything in stock or could not deliver within the day,” he said.

Residents of other Chinese cities have been stockpiling resources amid widespread lockdowns this year.

A doctor at Shanghai’s Sixth People’s Hospital said the abrupt relaxation of restrictions meant the city’s overworked physicians would soon face a ballooning number of Covid patients.

“Our hospitals are barely maintaining normal operations these days,” the doctor said.

*Additional reporting by Thomas Hale in Shanghai and Edward White in Seoul*

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