

**Chinese politics & policy**

## China scraps inbound quarantine rules in decisive break with zero-Covid regime

Requirement of five days at a hotel followed by three days at home will end on January 8



The rule change for those arriving in China signals the end of the zero-Covid system that transformed the country's relationship with the outside world © Mark R Cristino/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

**Thomas Hale** in Shanghai 6 HOURS AGO

China will remove quarantine requirements for inbound travellers from January 8 as the country dismantles the remnants of a zero-Covid regime that closed it off from the rest of the world for almost three years.

The National Health Commission on Monday unveiled the move as part of a wider announcement that downgraded the country's management of Covid-19 and definitively abandoned a host of other preventive measures.

The NHC said that more than 90 per cent of cases of the Omicron variant were “mild or asymptomatic”, part of a shift in tone as coronavirus rages across a country where until recently very few of the 1.4bn population had contracted it.

The government, which this month also scrapped the requirement for positive cases to quarantine at centralised facilities, is now battling a severe winter outbreak with estimated cases [spiralling into the hundreds of millions](#) and health services under pressure.

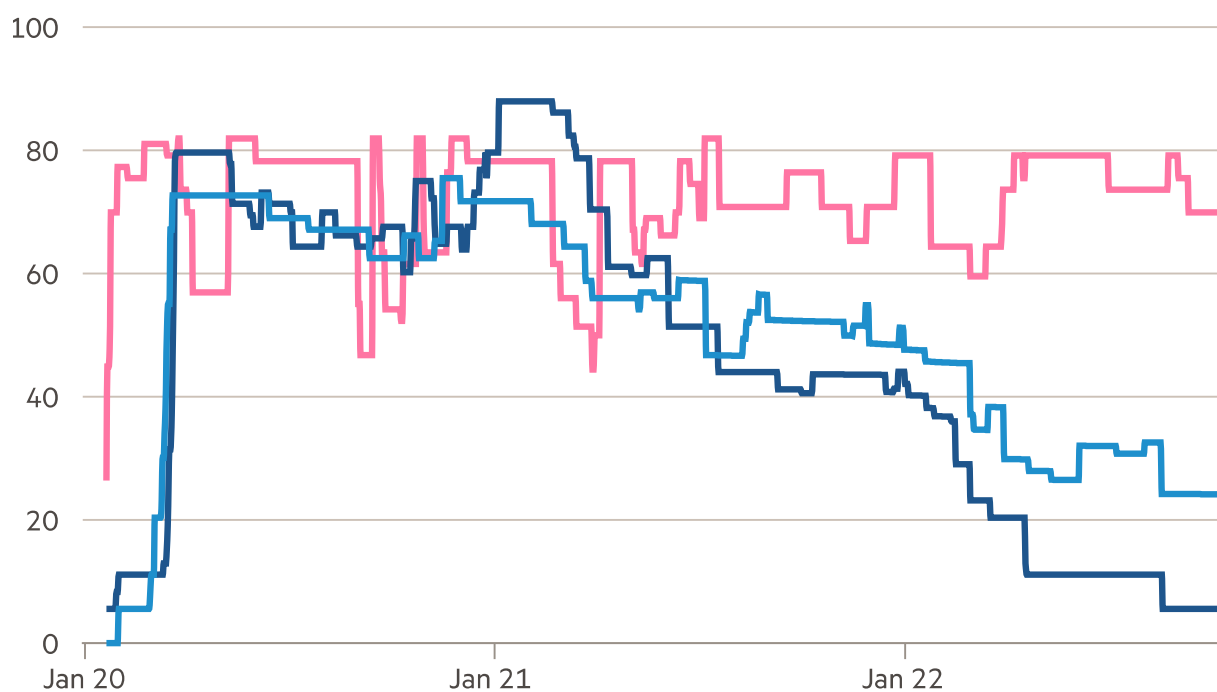
Models have estimated the virus could lead to close to 1mn deaths, though China's public data has ceased to reflect the situation on the ground and other zero-Covid rules such as mass testing have largely ended.

On Sunday, one day before it scrapped the inbound quarantine requirement, the NHC announced that it would no longer publish daily case tallies, handing over to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC on Tuesday said that under the downgraded classification, it would release Covid data only monthly.

Chinese equities led rises across the Asia-Pacific region, with the CSI 300 of Shanghai- and Shenzhen-listed stocks climbing 1.15 per cent, while the Shanghai Composite index gained 1 per cent. Hong Kong's exchange was closed.

## China's zero-Covid policy left it increasingly out-of-step with the outside world

Government response stringency index



FINANCIAL TIMES

Source: [Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford](#)

[China](#) had pursued a strict zero-Covid policy since the pandemic emerged, locking down many of its largest cities and imposing quarantines on foreign arrivals in an attempt to eliminate the virus within its borders.

Late this year, the policy began to unravel as authorities struggled to contain outbreaks in numerous cities, including the capital Beijing. Protesters [took to the streets in November](#) in a rare display of defiance against the central government,

which dramatically relaxed its approach.

Monday's announcement signalled the end of the zero-Covid system that transformed China's relationship with the outside world, and which for long periods successfully limited the transmission of the virus.

At one point this year, inbound international travellers were required to spend three weeks in a hotel room. The current policy of five days in a hotel followed by three days at home will end on January 8. Arrivals will still be required to have a negative Covid test result within 48 hours of departure and to wear masks on flights.

China's immigration authority on Tuesday announced that it would resume granting visas for mainland residents to travel abroad from January 8, in another pivotal development for the country's reopening. Authorities will also start issuing coveted Hong Kong entry permits for business or travel, the National Immigration Administration said, while visa extensions and new approvals for foreign passport holders will resume on the same day.

The sudden removal of restrictions has already put immense pressure on China's healthcare system, [especially in Beijing](#), which was one of the centres of the outbreak prior to the policy's abandonment and was thought to be one of the best-prepared cities.

Recent economic data has highlighted the costs of the policy. Retail sales, a gauge of consumer spending, fell 5.9 per cent year on year in November, worse than analyst expectations, while the economy is set to miss an annual 5.5 per cent growth target that was already its lowest in decades.

But analysts have also warned over the economic and corporate costs of the virus itself as it sweeps the country, with [Apple among those vulnerable](#) to further supply chain issues.

Under zero-Covid, citizens in China were required to test every few days at booths across major cities and scan a code on their phones to enter buildings. Such practices have largely disappeared as cases multiplied rapidly, though as recently as late November individuals in Shanghai were still being taken to central quarantine because they were close contacts of positive cases at bars.

*Additional reporting by Cheng Leng in Hong Kong*

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