

# China Holds the Line on ‘Zero Covid,’ but Some Wonder for How Long

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By Amy Qin and Amy Chang Chien

Jan. 21, 2022

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In a glitzy Shanghai shopping district, about 40 people who happened to be at a Uniqlo store were informed that they would be spending the night there. A suspected Covid case had been traced to the shop.

Elsewhere in the same city, Anna Rudashko was told to return to an office building she had visited for a meeting the day before. She spent 58 hours there with more than 200 strangers, waiting for test results.

Across China, in Shaanxi Province, Zhao Xiaoqing was on a second date, visiting a man at his parents’ home, when the local authorities locked down the neighborhood. She quarantined with them for nearly 30 days. (Fortunately, she said, “I got along well with his family.”)

China, which has largely kept the coronavirus at bay since 2020, is going to ever more extreme lengths to quell outbreaks that have proliferated around the country in recent weeks, and a growing number of people are finding their lives suddenly upended as a result.

At least 20 million people in three cities were under full lockdown as recently as last week, and many more cities across the country have been subjected to partial lockdowns and mass testing. During the past month, at least 30 major Chinese cities have reported locally transmitted Covid cases.

The case numbers themselves are minuscule by global standards, and no Covid deaths have been reported in China’s current wave. On Friday, the health authorities reported a total of 23 new locally transmitted cases in five cities.

But many cases have involved the highly transmissible Omicron variant, and with each passing day, the government’s dogged pursuit of “zero Covid” is looking harder to achieve. Many wonder how long it can be maintained without causing widespread, lasting disruptions to China’s economy and society.