China says 239 people died from COVID-19 in June in a significant uptick

July 6 2023

A woman wearing a face mask carries a child as they walk at a public park in Beijing, on June 1, 2023. China reported Thursday, July 6, 2023 that 239 people died from COVID-19 in June in a significant uptick months after it lifted most containment measures. Credit: AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein, File

China reported Thursday that 239 people died from COVID-19 in June

in a significant uptick months after it lifted most containment measures.

The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention had reported 164 deaths in May and none at all in April and March.

China started employing a "zero-COVID" containment strategy in early 2020 and credits the strict lockdowns, quarantines, border closures and compulsory mass testing with significantly saving lives.

But the measures were lifted suddenly in December with little preparation, leading to a final surge in which about 60,000 people died, according to the official toll. Deaths this year peaked in January and February, hitting a high of 4,273 on Jan, 4, but then declined gradually to zero on Feb. 23, according to the Chinese CDC.

Chinese health officials didn't say whether they expect the trend to continue or if they would recommend for preventative measures to be restored.

Two of the deaths in June were from respiratory failure caused by infection, while the CDC said the others involved underlying conditions. Those can include diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and other chronic illnesses.

Between Jan. 3, 2020, and July 5, 2023, China reported 99,292,081 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 121,490 deaths to the World Health Organization.

Experts estimate that many hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps more, may have died in China—far higher than the official toll, but still a significantly lower death rate than in the United States and Europe.

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