

China iPhone factory under lockdown quadruples bonuses for workers who stay

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China is the last major economy committed to a zero-Covid strategy, persisting with snap lockdowns, mass testing and quarantine in a bid to curb outbreaks.

The world's largest iPhone factory in central China told staff Tuesday it would quadruple their bonuses if they remained at the plant after scores

of workers fled a COVID outbreak at the facility.

China is the last major economy committed to a zero-COVID strategy, persisting with snap lockdowns, mass testing and lengthy quarantines in a bid to stamp out emerging outbreaks.

But new variants have tested local officials' ability to snuff out flare-ups faster than they can spread, causing much of the country to live under an ever-changing mosaic of COVID curbs.

Taiwanese tech giant Foxconn's plant in Zhengzhou has been under lockdown since mid-October, with the company saying it is testing employees daily and keeping them in a closed loop.

But complaints from workers circulating on Chinese social media have alleged poor working conditions and inadequate virus protection for employees who are not infected.

"I only took a handbag, three packets of instant noodles, four bottles of milk, two bottles of water and some bread," an escaped Foxconn worker named Li Yan who walked for three hours after leaving the facility told the state-run China Newsweek.

Videos shared online over the weekend showed Foxconn employees fleeing the company's campus and returning to their hometowns on foot, in a bid to avoid COVID travel restrictions.

Foxconn's Zhengzhou plant said on its official WeChat account that, starting from Tuesday, employees will receive a daily bonus of 400 yuan (\$55) for showing up to work—quadruple the previous subsidy of 100 yuan a day.

Staff will also receive additional bonuses if they attend work for 15 days

or longer in November, reaching 15,000 yuan if they record full attendance this month.

—'Controllable' outbreak—

One unnamed factory manager told China Newsweek Tuesday that there had been no serious infections so far, and insisted that the outbreak was "controllable".

Foxconn—which supplies iPhones to US tech firm Apple—has promised to do more to help employees and organise buses to transport workers back to their hometowns should they wish to leave, in what it has called a "protracted battle" against the virus.

Local governments in the area surrounding the city asked fleeing workers to register with authorities if they returned home and to complete several days of quarantine upon arrival.

The southern semi-autonomous territory of Macau also announced mass testing of its 700,000 population Tuesday after a handful of cases were discovered, triggering a lockdown of one of its casinos.

It is a fresh blow for the city's struggling gambling industry, which had been poised for recovery after plans to relax travel between mainland China and the former Portuguese colony this month.

China reported more than 2,000 fresh domestic infections Tuesday for the second straight day, as curbs ramped up in response to a wave of regional outbreaks.

The southern Chinese manufacturing hub of Guangzhou also announced partial lockdowns in several districts Monday in response to rising case numbers.

Guangzhou reported more than 520 fresh infections on Tuesday.

New outbreaks have also emerged in northern cities near China's border with Russia and North Korea as winter approaches.

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