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Three weeks ago, I tested positive for Covid right after landing in Shanghai. This was despite FOUR negative pre-flight tests.

Might be the first foreign journalist in China to be this lucky. Wrote a thing about it.

<https://t.co/BrMfko5KHq>

I was first taken to a district triage hospital for confirmation tests. They swabbed me EVERYWHERE and took blood twice. Also had a CT scan. <https://t.co/67T8o0SSaw>



After confirmation tests came back positive, I was then taken to the main Covid hospital in Shanghai, the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Centre in Jinshan District.

Here, they took more blood (14 tubes), swabs, ECG and later sent me for another CT scan. <https://t.co/x78LGbZAqd>





Doctors told me that I could leave once my nucleic acid tests came back negative two days in a row.

That should be easy, I thought. Ppl I know back home are negative within days. I was isolated for 11 days before getting cleared. <https://t.co/VI6zZEKfKU>



The food was basic though edible. Porridge & pickles for breakfast, rice and dishes for other meals. There was always fruit though they might've used more than the recommended amount of oil in the cooking <https://t.co/deeyRa00C6>



On Day 3, a care package from the Singapore Consulate arrived — they had been informed because I'm a foreigner. I was inexplicably moved. There was something comforting about seeing items from the “real world” in the sterile hospital setting. <https://t.co/okz8PW7Wro>



Without a television or a stable internet connection, the days went by slowly.

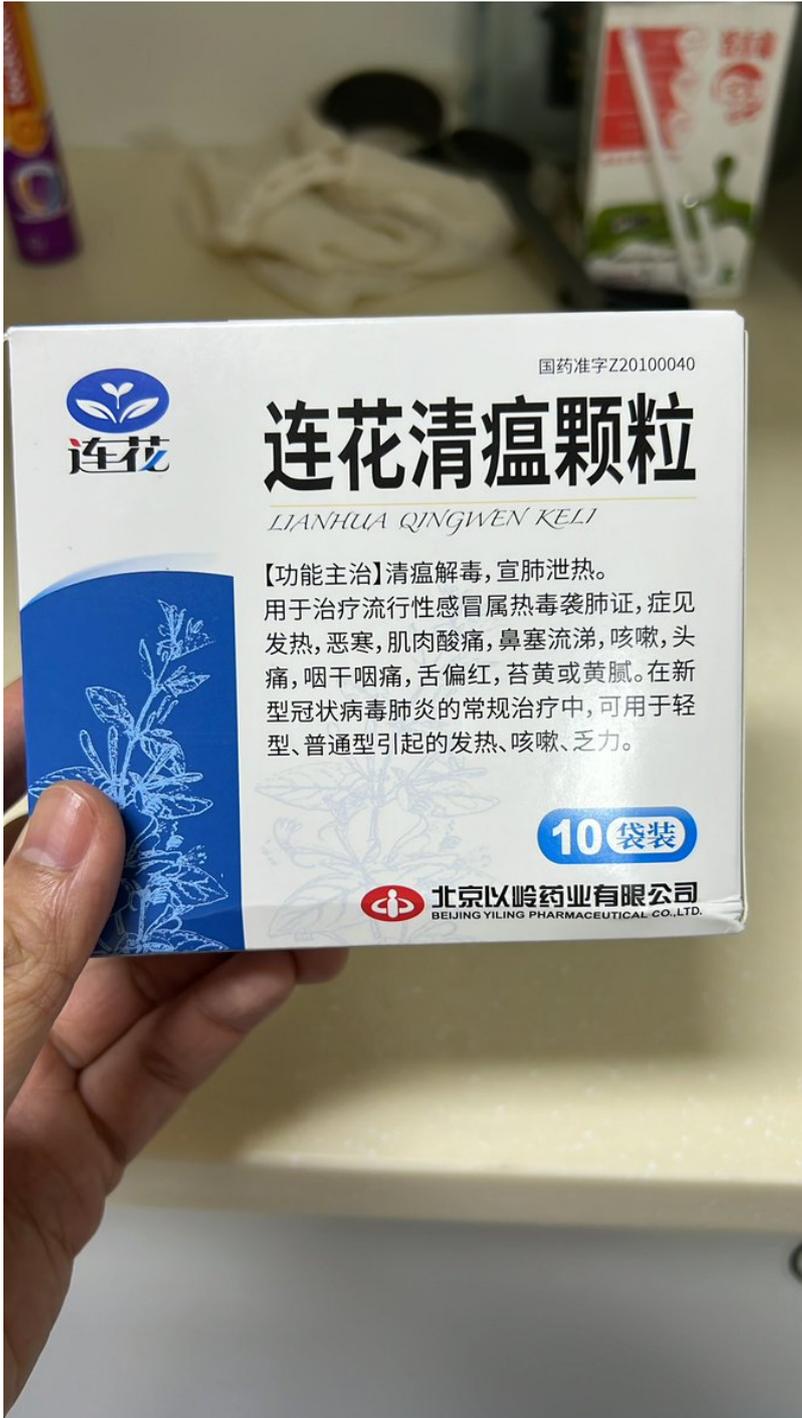
Other patients in matching hospital issued pyjamas would chat in the corridor. I ended up reading and using my noise cancelling headphones a lot. <https://t.co/xuZ3Tx9N2l>



China uses a measure called CT levels to decide whether or not you can be allowed out of hospital. Every morning btwn 5 and 5.30, I got nasal swabs.

Cycle threshold is the number of times a sample needs to be amplified before the virus can be spotted. The magic number is 35. <https://t.co/vGqO43uky6>

Three days in, my only symptom of a sore throat morphed into a cough. The doctors seemed almost relieved — at least there was something they could prescribe! Was given Lianhua Qingwen, the TCM “miracle cure” for Covid, and cough medicine tasting like Fernet. <https://t.co/JiWFIqd616>





But the problem with using CT levels as a benchmark is those numbers can fluctuate. On the first weekend there, levels seemed to be on an upward trajectory but dipped (and plateaued) the following week. It was frustrating.

I tried keeping spirits up with coffee. <https://t.co/5vl662w1yl>

Finally on Day 11, good news! My CT levels were 40 and I could leave the next day.

But first, there was disinfecting to be done. <https://t.co/CsTvJ5r7hf>

After leaving hospital, I have to isolate for seven more days in a govt designated hotel. There is no air conditioning and the corridor smells of cigarettes but hey, at least it isn't hospital.

Technically that also means I should regain freedom tomorrow (June 12). <https://t.co/vTqrozA6JE>



Unfortunately, things aren't always straightforward in these Covid times. Yangpu District where I'm in now has a medium risk area. And given Beijing's burgeoning outbreak, they're expected to be extra strict.

Will I make it back within the month? Stay tuned to find out.

UPDATE: it is now June 20, 15 days since I was discharged from hospital. Beijing says I need a negative test to be allowed back in.

Simple enough, you'd think. No, Beijing and Shanghai use different systems that aren't linked.

This is especially tricky since I have a foreign passport instead of a Chinese ID. No problem, there's a national system!

Plot twist: that system doesn't work for those of us who use passports as ID, ie foreigners who don't have Chinese PR. There are ways around this, of course. The data can be manually added back end.

Next plot twist: they can't do that for me because I'm a recovered covid patient.

Meanwhile, my dispatch from Shanghai last week — a city still tiptoeing its way out of a lockdown. Have a read.

<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/being-at-the-wrong-place-at-the-wrong-time-can-mean-quarantine>
<https://t.co/kByKUVKTEI>

Sunday, June 19, 2022

LetterFromShanghai

Being at the wrong place at the wrong time can mean quarantine

Nearly 3 weeks after the Chinese city exited 2-month lockdown, residents are still wary



Elizabeth Law
China Correspondent
In Shanghai

Sales assistant Chen Jingya can count on one hand the number of customers who wander into her shop in a day.

Working for a European retailer at the high-end APM mall in Shanghai, Ms Chen said that in the two weeks since shops were allowed to reopen on June 1, patrons have been few and far between.

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Cam781, a high-end camping equipment retail store in Shanghai that also doubles as a cafe. Since the dine-in ban was imposed, the outlet has set up folding tables and chairs outside, allowing customers to lounge on the sidewalk while sipping craft beer and wine. It also has camping equipment on the sidewalk and a grass patch beside the shop for customers to experience its products first-hand. ST PHOTO: ELIZABETH LAW



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IAPM mall, a popular shopping and dining destination, on a Sunday evening. A shop assistant there said patrons have been few and far between since shops were allowed to reopen. ST PHOTO: ELIZABETH LAW

streets. Mask-wearing was an afterthought.

This year, the holiday fell on Friday, June 3, just two days after the city emerged from lockdown.

The streets were dotted with small groups happy to be out of their homes, but unable to gather at restaurants; some estates remained sealed off and, crucially, domestic travellers stayed away.

Sporadic cases popping up in the community meant venturing into the wrong district could result in travel restrictions, or a lengthy quarantine upon return.

Those who ventured out wore masks, some doubling up their face coverings even when outdoors.

Residents say the trust that their rights will be respected is low.

Seeing promises repeatedly broken by people in authority made her start questioning who could be believed, said Miss Stella Xie, who works in the healthcare industry.

The 24-year-old is completing her internship at a private hospital but had to stay home for most of the lockdown because she was not considered essential to the city's operations.

"They initially insisted no large-scale lockdown was coming because the city could not afford to do that. Then it was going to be five days on each side of the river, but suddenly all of us were indefinitely stuck in our homes," she said.

"Now, whenever we see official announcements 'debunking rumours', it's inevitable we think there's some truth in what they're denying. If not, why go to all that effort?"

Like many of her peers, the housing native had taken advantage of Shanghai's policies attracting talent to move some 100km to the city two years ago and hoped to call it home one day.

"But right now, I'm emotionally exhausted with this place," she said.

"I'm thinking of leaving just to be somewhere closer to home... What if there's another pandemic in the future and the same thing happens again? At least there I'll have a support network."

Social media is rife with posts by young professionals and blue-collar workers leaving the city, fondly called the "Magical Capital", many citing the 2/1

month lockdown as a catalyst for their departures.

Many expressed shock at the way some residents, including the elderly, had been dragged out of their homes at night and taken to centralised quarantine facilities after they tested positive for Covid-19.

Others who tested positive also had their homes forcibly broken into for disinfection, and returned to find items and furniture damaged by highly concentrated chemicals and liquids.

"Some of our elderly neighbours got very worried because they said this lack of respect for private property, living on a knife's edge not knowing when the situation would take a turn, reminded them of (the Cultural Revolution) 50 years ago," said counsellor Zhu Yun, 45, who had been part of a neighbourhood volunteer group during the lockdown.

"For those my age and younger, we had never experienced a time like that so it was hard to reconcile the fact that these acts were being carried out by the very people meant to look after us."

At the Xintiandi shopping district, usually full of shoppers and tourists, uniformed police patrol the quiet streets, ensuring establishments comply with Covid-19 rules.

A shopper, who gave her name as Cassidy Zhang, had her two-year-old son Mason in tow while a nanny pushed his pram, laden with a light orange Hermes paper bag.

"We thought of going to the park but at the boutique, I can meet my friends and we get served some refreshments. It's almost like going to tea."

In an affluent part of Changning district, high-end outdoor equipment store and cafe Camp781 set up camping equipment on the sidewalk and a grass patch beside the shop.

"Any potential customers can actually experience our products as they're meant to be used," said a staff member who gave his name as Ten.

On a Monday evening, customers lounged around on folding chairs and tables, sipping craft beer and wine in the balmy summer breeze.

Business was still slow given that many were still worried about being out, he said. But some, like cafe owner John Lin, believe there is no better time to start a business.

His hole-in-the-wall coffee shop with just two seats is sandwiched between a real estate agency and a hefty housing compound.

Modelled after a rustic Japanese cafe, patrons can skirt the dine-in ban by sitting outside on public benches, sipping 23 yuan (\$4.80) coffee or a large chicken rice for 15 yuan.

Ms Lin's year-old shiba inu, Kurii, keeps watch.

"Even though it's been challenging to get things up and running, I felt it was important to have a place where people can come for a little respite," he said.

On an adjacent street, a makeshift queue had formed in front of a mobile testing station.

"We all need a bit of calm and positivity in the city right now and there's no better way to bring that than great coffee in a peaceful setting," he said.

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UPDATE: It is June 30 and I'm in Chongqing. Still not back in Beijing because I have Shanghai, a city that contains mid-risk areas, on my 14-day travel history.

Hold on, I hear you ask, but hasn't China eased travel policy and removed the * from travel tracking mini programme, essentially meaning that you'll be prevented from travelling only if you're actually in a high/medium risk area?

Well, technically, yes. But as I often say, nothing in this country is ever straightforward or easy.

In this case, the implementation and how policy trickles down towards local govts (in this case the Beijing Municipality) is a different matter altogether.

In their entry rules, according to the State Council website, Beijing bars entry to anyone with a 14-day travel history to cities containing medium risk zones.

Still, I wait.

But the city and its people are wonderful, for which I'm grateful. <https://t.co/iAhIReKvxb>

The food too, is wonderful.

As are my new four-legged friends. <https://t.co/HgIRQYdJfB>







UPDATE: Six weeks, endless red tape and false starts, a hospital stay, three hotels and two cities later, I'M IN BEIJING.
<https://t.co/d4qUjUNieK>



The cats are clearly THRILLED to see me ■ <https://t.co/wsNhSwuhuA>

