The BMJ

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2022;376:o329<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.o329>

Published: 09 February 2022

THE BIG PICTURE

A winter Olympics amid “zero covid”

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Healthcare workers for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games attend the women's 3000 m speed skating race at China's National Speed Skating Oval on 5 February.

The games opened in Beijing on 4 February under a pandemic cloud. China is seeing rising numbers of cases—46 a day at the time of writing—caused by the omicron variant, putting its zero covid approach under strain.¹ Visitors from other countries must be vaccinated or quarantine for 21 days. China's strict “closed loop” bubble tests games participants every day for SARS-CoV-2 and immediately puts them in isolation if the result is positive. Venues are cordoned off, no one is allowed out of their hotels between events, robots deliver their food, and even rubbish is isolated. Locals have been warned not to help if Olympic Games vehicles get into crashes.

Officially, China has recorded just 73 cases per million during the pandemic, but although vaccination rates are reasonable studies have indicated that the vaccines being used in China lack effectiveness against omicron.²

1 Silver A. Covid-19: Why China is sticking to “zero tolerance” public health measures. *BMJ* 2021;375:n2756. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n2756.

2 Dolgin E. Omicron thwarts some of the world's most-used covid vaccines. *Nature*. Jan 2022. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00079-6>.

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