



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Estimate: COVID deaths of Tibetan elders may exceed 220,000

Read online: <https://savetibet.org/covid-and-deaths-in-post-zero-covid-tibet/>

January 19, 2023

Note: As of Jan. 24, 2023, this report has been edited to clarify that the estimates provided reflect a potential worst-case scenario of elderly Tibetans dying from COVID-19 following China's abrupt abandonment of its "zero-COVID" policy on Dec. 7, 2022.

Over 220,000 Tibetans age 60 and above could die following the abrupt end of China's "zero-COVID policy," according to an estimate by the International Campaign for Tibet based on demographic data and health studies.

A new report from ICT uses studies from Japan and Brazil, as well as on-the-ground accounts from Tibetans and data from China's census, to estimate how high the death toll could rise in Tibet, which China leaves out of its official COVID reporting.

While several models project the number of COVID infections and deaths in China since it abandoned its "zero-COVID" strategy on Dec. 7, this is the first known attempt to estimate the deaths in Tibet.

ICT's report also features first-hand accounts from Tibetans witnessing an unprecedented number of corpses brought to sky burial sites and cremation grounds in their homeland. One Tibetan says, "There's a shortage of vultures for the disposal of bodies."

"The abrupt end of the zero-COVID policy has had disastrous effects, but China's lack of transparency and access to Tibet, as well as its discriminatory treatment of Tibetans, have made it difficult to estimate the full extent of the horrors there," ICT said. "Tibetans are living a nightmare and facing a potentially unimaginable death toll. The Chinese government's mismanagement of this crisis is endangering lives not only in Tibet, but in China and the entire world."

Fatality estimate

ICT's report uses China's 2020 census data as a baseline and arrives at its estimates through reasoning, logical deduction and extrapolations from available analytical studies.

A study in Japan and acknowledgement by China's National Health Commission show that the fatality risk is highest for those 80 and above. Additionally, studies in Brazil show that the effectiveness of two doses of Chinese vaccines is very low for those in that age group. Vaccine effectiveness wanes with time.

According to sources, elder Tibetans have been excluded from a third-dose vaccination campaign that began last year.

Until a current and very large sample-size vaccine efficiency study of Chinese vaccines is conducted independently, the studies conducted in Brazil stand as the best proxy to estimate the number of deaths of Tibetan elders.

Based on these studies and China's census data, ICT estimates that over 220,000 Tibetans age 60 and above could die following the end of the zero-COVID policy in Tibet. If case fatality rate during the current COVID surge is taken into consideration, over 45,000 Tibetans who are 80 and older may die.

While these estimates reflect a worst-case scenario based on current predicted levels of vaccination and immunity, as well as China's ongoing mismanagement of the pandemic, a true COVID death toll in Tibet cannot be determined without genuine transparency from the Chinese government.

“Unprecedented and not normal”

ICT's report also includes anecdotal and visual evidence showing that hundreds of bodies are continuously being brought to various sky burial sites in Tibet. Most of the dead are Tibetan elders.

Sources in Lhasa, Tibet's capital, informed ICT that the vast majority of the Lhasa population are infected with COVID, and the death toll is mounting each day.

A large number of deaths due to COVID were also reported in Tibetan areas outside the officially designated “Tibet Autonomous Region,” which spans only about half of Tibet.

In one social media conversation heard by ICT, a Tibetan urged others in the community not to be lax about COVID, saying many corpses were being brought to a traditional sky burial site near Lhasa.

“On Jan. 2, there were around 100 corpses,” the Tibetan said. “This is unprecedented and not normal.”



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | info@savetibet.org

ICT Europe
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
icteurope@savetibet.nl

ICT Deutschland e.V.
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435
Berlin, Germany
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087
info@savetibet.de

ICT Brussels
11, rue de la linière | 1060
Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
info@save-tibet.eu