

24 new Games-related Covid cases reported, IOC defends Olympics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Tokyo, July 29

THE TOKYO OLYMPICS organisers on Thursday announced 24 new Covid-19 cases, including three athletes, the highest one-day figures so far at the Games, even as the organisers insisted that the showpiece is not behind the record surge in the host city.



The host city is in a state of emergency with Covid-19 infections at a record high.

Out of the 24 positive cases, six are Games-concerned personnel and 15 are contractors, besides the three athletes.

Tokyo had recorded 3,177 cases on Wednesday, while the Covid-19 infection numbers for the whole country was an all-time high of 9,583, the first time the figure has topped 9,000.

On Wednesday, 16 Olympics-related cases were reported but none were athletes and none were staying in the Games Village.

The total number of cases in the Games village currently stands at 23.

The organisers had said 38,484 people from abroad had entered Japan for the Games till Monday.

Japan has kept its cases and deaths lower than many other countries, but its seven-day average is increasing, according to the country's health ministry.

Meanwhile, the IOC spokesman Adams said there was nothing to suggest a link between the Games and the rising figures.

"As far as I'm aware there's not a single case of an infection spreading to the Tokyo population from the athletes or Olympic movement," he told reporters here.

"We have the most tested community probably anywhere... in the world, on top of that you have some of the toughest lockdown restrictions in the athlete's village," he added.

The organisers also insisted that the Games are not burdening the city's medical system.

RESURGING VIRUS

Delta's spread is testing even stringent 'Covid zero' defenses

Among the hardest hit is Australia, where delta is slipping through the mandatory hotel quarantine system far more easily than past strains

BLOOMBERG July 29

THE RISE OF the highly-contagious delta variant is challenging even the most aggressive Covid-19 containment regimes, an ominous sign as economies look to open up and return to pre-pandemic life.

An outbreak that started at an airport in the eastern Chinese city of Nanjing is testing that country's zero-tolerance measures, which are some of the most sweeping and comprehensive in the world.

New infections are rising by the dozens and seeding subsequent clusters around China despite well-honed systems of mass testing and stringent quarantines.

Beijing reported its first locally transmitted infection in six months on Thursday, linked to an outbreak in the southern province of Hunan among people who'd recently been to Nanjing.

The variant is scaling some



of the toughest virus defenses, with "Covid Zero" places — countries that had snuffed out the virus within their borders — still seeing outbreaks despite strict anti-virus measures.

Among the hardest hit is Australia, where delta is slipping through the mandatory hotel quarantine system far more easily than past strains and taking advantage of a low community vaccination rate.

A delta-fueled outbreak even forced Sydney, despite its efficient contact tracing and testing apparatus, into weeks of lockdown, with cases climbing to nearly 3,000 since mid-June.

In China, the first infections were among nine airport clean-

ers. The cluster quickly expanded to their close contacts, then to a handful of other locations, leading to nearly 200 confirmed Covid cases as of Thursday.

It's one of China's biggest outbreaks since a wave concentrated in the country's northeast saw more than 2,000 infections last winter.

Officials have confirmed that the new outbreak is caused by the delta strain, which has been driving a resurgence in infections across the world.

The variant, which first emerged in India and is more transmissible than other strains, is exposing the limitations of the strategy of virus elimination, which is also favored by New Zealand and Singapore.

Taiwan, which went months without any infections at all last year, recently backed away from Covid Zero, saying it was no longer targeting nil cases but transitioning toward a strategy of living with the virus.

Many of the people infected in China, including the Nanjing airport workers, had been fully vaccinated — and only four have developed severe cases of the disease — according to official data.

The numbers signal that the immunity generated by China's vaccines while enough to ward off critical illness and death, is still insufficient to prevent the spread of the variants.

Nanjing is ramping up Covid measures as the outbreak added 18 more cases on Thursday. All residential compounds have been placed under lockdown, and the city is starting a third round of virus testing for its more than 9 million people.

The airport has canceled most flights and its staff have been placed under restrictions. The infected Beijing resident is likely connected to a cluster at an outdoor theater performance in Hunan, where the audience included infected people who had traveled to Nanjing.

It's the first local infection recorded in tightly-guarded Beijing since the start of the year, when an outbreak in nearby Hebei province led to sporadic cases in the Chinese capital.

The cluster has placed every one of the roughly 3,000 theater-goers in Hunan at risk of infection, local authorities said, indicating that the number could grow.

The Chinese vaccines' efficacy in preventing symptomatic Covid has ranged between 50 to 80% in studies, lower than the more than 90% effectiveness for the potent mRNA vaccines developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, as well as Moderna.

Countries including Thailand and United Arab Emirates that initially relied on Chinese vaccines have decided to offer booster shots to some fully-vaccinated people to provide better protection against the delta strain.

Globally, the variant has already forced the US to institute new mask mandates, delayed a reopening in Singapore and put other Australian cities under lockdown.

Despite its largely closed borders, China has also seen more frequent virus flareups since the beginning of this year as variants from other hotspots around the world get in, often through workers in high-risk areas such as airports and cargo centers.

The outbreaks, while minimal compared to clusters in parts of the US and Southeast Asia, are putting pressure on officials to rethink the vaccination campaign to possibly include booster shots.

SICOM LIMITED advertisement regarding property sale

RESTILE CERAMICS LIMITED advertisement regarding AGM

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Big Tech starts requiring vaccines; Twitter closes re-opened US offices

REUTERS July 29

TWITTER IS SHUTTING its re-opened offices in United States, while other big tech companies are making vaccination mandatory for on-campus employees, as the highly infectious Delta Covid-19 variant drives a resurgence in cases.

Alphabet's Google and Facebook said on Wednesday all US employees must get vaccinated to step into offices.

Google is also planning to expand its vaccination drive to other regions in the coming months.

Twitter, which on Wednesday also paused future office reopenings, had started allowing employees back to its campuses in San Francisco and New York at 50% capacity about a fortnight ago after more than 16 months.

US coronavirus cases have



been rising due to the Delta variant, which emerged in India but has quickly spread and now accounts for more than 80% of US coronavirus cases.

Health authorities on Tuesday said Americans fully vaccinated against Covid-19 should go back to wearing masks in indoor public places in regions where the coronavirus is spreading rapidly.

San Francisco-based ride-hailing company Lyft, which

had already made vaccinations mandatory for employees returning to the office, postponed its reopening to February from September.

"We anticipate the Covid situation will remain fluid for the upcoming months, making it difficult for us to land a clear return date without a possibility of moving it again," Lyft CEO Logan Green said in a memo to staff.

According to a Deadline re-

From Facebook to Twitter, Big Tech sees social commerce driving sales growth

SHEILA DANG & NIVEDITA BALU July 29

LED BY FACEBOOK, social media platforms from Alphabet's YouTube to Snap and Twitter are investing heavily in shopping features to drive revenue growth, a major theme that emerged during second-quarter results over the past week.

The companies are vying for a piece of the so-called social commerce industry, which relies on users' ability to discover and buy products through social media apps and is expected to balloon to \$50 billion from \$36 billion in annual sales by 2023 in the United States according to research firm eMarketer.

The success of social commerce stems in part from product targeting based on user interests, with sales generating more data that can be used for future advertising and merchandise placements.

Facebook, widely considered the leader in social commerce, and Google helped retailers bring in sales in the last quarter, with e-commerce player Shopify saying the growth rate of products sold through the two tech companies' platforms was "several times that" of websites run by the merchants themselves.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said that enabling commerce and making it easier for businesses to commu-



nicate with customers through its Messenger and WhatsApp apps was "the right long-term bet."

Retailers are increasingly hopping on to the trend as Covid-19 restrictions weigh on brick-and-mortar sales.

Brands ranging from luxury fashion house Burberry to fast fashion giant H&M have signed up celebrities and influencers to get millions of their followers to make purchases off ephemerally stories or posts by asking them to "swipe up to purchase."

While the business is small for now, the social media giants are eyeing the data generated from users' shopping and browsing habits for targeted advertising. The scramble for user data has become even more crucial as recent privacy changes from Apple

limit tech companies' ability to track iPhone users and serve personalised advertising, ad experts have said.

Facebook launched Shops in May 2020 during the height of the pandemic, luring brands with an easy way to sell items directly through Facebook and Instagram and consumers with a curated and personalized way to discover trendy clothes or home goods.

Facebook was the top social commerce platform according to a survey conducted by eMarketer in June 2020, with 18% of respondents saying they had purchased a product via Facebook. That compared with 11% for Facebook-owned Instagram and 3% for Pinterest.

Even as restrictions lift, analysts say the demand for shopping online is unlikely

to retreat. "People have gotten accustomed to buying online," said Edward Jones analyst Dave Heger. "I don't think that they're going to go completely back to the level they were at before in terms of purchasing at brick and mortar stores."

Snap is investing in augmented reality technology designed to help users virtually try on items like watches, jewelry and other apparel to cut down on returns, a major problem faced by online retailers.

Snapchat users can take a photo of a friend's outfit with the app and find similar looks or product recommendations, Snap chief executive Evan Spiegel said last week during the company's earnings conference call.