

China reports 60,000 Covid-related deaths in a month

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: China's health authorities have reported almost 60,000 Covid-related deaths in just over a month, report AFP and Reuters. It is the first major death toll released by the government since the loosening of its virus restrictions in early December. There were a total of 59,938 Covid-related deaths between 8 December and January 12, Jiao Yahui, head of the Bureau of Medical Administration under the National Health Commission, told a press conference.

The figure refers only to deaths recorded at medical facilities, with the total toll likely to be higher. It includes 5,503 deaths caused by respiratory failure directly due to the virus, and 54,435 deaths caused by underlying diseases combined with Covid, Mr Jiao said. China has been accused of underreporting its number of virus deaths since abandoning its zero-Covid policy in early December. Health officials insisted on Wednesday it was "not necessary" to dwell on the exact number.

Beijing had previously revised its methodology for categorising Covid fatalities, saying it would count only those who die specifically of respiratory failure caused by the virus. But this had been criticised by the World Health Organization, which said the new definition was "too narrow". WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus had said the organisation was continuing to "ask China for more rapid, regular, reliable data on hospitalisation and deaths, as well as viral sequencing". China's health officials said today the average age of those who died was 80.3 years old, with over 90% of fatalities above 65 years old. Most suffered from underlying conditions, they said. Millions of people over 60 years of age in China are unvaccinated.