

China braces for wave of workers fleeing iPhone factory in Covid-hit Zhengzhou

samedi 5 novembre 2022, par [Press Agencies](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 30 octobre 2022).

Cities near Foxconn plant draw up plans to isolate migrant workers who are returning to home towns

Cities in central [China](#) have hastily drawn up plans to isolate migrant workers fleeing to their home towns from the country's largest iPhone factory, amid fears they will spread coronavirus after leaving the plant in Covid-hit Zhengzhou.

Videos shared on Chinese social media showed people who are allegedly workers at the [Foxconn](#) plant climbing over fences and carrying their belongings along a road. It was previously reported that a number of workers had been placed under quarantine because of an outbreak of the disease.

Foxconn, a supplier to Apple that is headquartered in Taiwan, has about 200,000 workers at the Zhengzhou complex. It has not disclosed the number of infected workers, nor the number who have left, but said on Sunday that it would not stop them from departing.

Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan province, reported 167 locally transmitted Covid cases in the seven days to 29 October, up from 97 infections in the previous seven-day period.

Late on Saturday, nearby cities including Yuzhou, Changge and Qinyang urged Foxconn workers to report to local authorities before going home.

Returning workers were to travel "point to point" in arranged vehicles and be quarantined on arrival, authorities said in separate letters posted on social media and addressed to Zhengzhou Foxconn workers.

Photographs and videos circulating on Chinese social media since Saturday appeared to show Foxconn workers returning home, trekking across fields in the day and along roads at night.

"Some people were walking amid wheat fields with their luggage, blankets and quilts," wrote a WeChat user in a post about the social media images. "I couldn't help but feel sad."

Volunteers from nearby villages put out food and drinks for the Foxconn workers. One such volunteer, who asked to be identified only as Zhang out of privacy concerns, was put in charge of distributing supplies that his village in Xingyang county had prepared.

He said the people shown in a video he uploaded to the platform Douyin were Foxconn workers because they would have had to take that road if they were leaving the facility.

Under [China's ultra-strict zero-Covid policy](#), cities have been mandated to act swiftly to quell any outbreaks, with potential measures including full-scale lockdowns. On 19 October, Foxconn banned all dining at canteens and required workers to eat their meals in their dormitories.

“The government agreed to resume dine-in meals to improve the convenience and satisfaction of employees’ lives,” Foxconn said on Sunday.

“At the same time, for some employees who want to return home, the [plant] is cooperating with the government to organise personnel and vehicles to provide a point-to-point orderly return service for employees from today.”

Disruptions from China’s Covid policies to commerce and industry [have intensified in recent weeks as cases have multiplied](#).

Shanghai Disneyland said on Saturday it would operate at reduced capacity. On Wednesday, Universal Beijing Resort was suspended after the visit of an infected individual.

“We are very aware that under the current situation, it is a protracted battle,” Foxconn said. The situation was gradually coming under control, the company added, and that it would coordinate backup production capacity with its other plants to reduce any potential impact.

Apple did not immediately reply to a request for comment on the Foxconn situation.

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P.-S.

- The Guardian. Sun 30 Oct 2022 14.03 GMT : <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/oct/30/china-braces-for-wave-of-workers-fleeing-iphone-factory-in-covid-hit-zhengzhou>

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