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China's COVID-19 situation enters a low pandemic level

Yang Jian

CHINA'S COVID-19 situation has entered a "low pandemic level" and infections across the country have maintained a downward trend, health authorities said early this week.

As more people return to cities after the Spring Festival holiday, it is necessary to enhance regular COVID-19 prevention and control for public transport and other crowded places. Individuals should keep wearing personal protections, said Mi Feng, a spokesman for the National Health Commission.

"Rural areas remain the top priority in the nation's current COVID-19 prevention and control," Mi told the first press conference of the State Council joint COVID-19 prevention and control mechanism after the week-long Spring Festival holiday.

Multiple Chinese ministries and authorities released their latest statistics during the January 21-27 Chinese Lunar New Year holiday.

Key points at the press briefing:

- No new imported COVID-19

variant has been found in China. The Omicron BA.5.2 and BF.7 remain the main strains in the current round of the pandemic, per the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

- There was no rise in COVID-19 infections in rural areas during the festival, when a huge number of people returned to their hometowns for family reunion, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said.
- A total of 71,000 foreigners came to China during the holiday, more than double that in 2022. Some 741,000 people from the Chinese mainland traveled overseas during the same period, a 93.7 percent increase to that of last year, according to the National Immigration Administration.
- Retail and catering businesses saw a 6.8 percent on-year boost during the holiday, according to the Ministry of Commerce.
- A total of 226 million trips were made via the railway, highway, waterway and aviation during the holiday, a 71.2 percent increase on year but 46.4 percent lower than the pre-COVID-19 level in 2019, the Ministry of Transport revealed.



A file photo of China's independently developed AG600M large amphibious aircraft. — CFP

Domestic amphibious jet enters airworthiness flight-test phase

CHINA'S indigenously-developed AG600 large amphibious aircraft has entered the airworthiness flight-test phase, the Aviation Industry Corp of China (AVIC) said on Wednesday.

Two AG600M airplanes, the firefighting model belonging to the AG600 family, have arrived at the flight-test center in Xi'an, northwest Shaanxi Province,

according to the country's top plane-maker.

This marked the official entry of the special-mission aircraft into the flight-test phase, which is a necessary step for it to obtain the type certificate, AVIC said.

Codenamed Kunlong, or "water dragon" in Chinese, the AG600 aircraft family is being developed to serve emergency rescue missions.

It can be used in forest firefighting, maritime search and rescue, and other emergencies.

The AG600M is specifically designed to combat forest fires.

Its maximum take-off weight is 60 tons, with a water-carrying capacity up to 12 tons and a flight range up to 4,500 kilometers.

(Xinhua)