



## CHINA – A FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT

China was the first country to be hit by the coronavirus and also the first to curb the outbreak. We are keeping our finger on the pulse of the situation in the Middle Kingdom, and to shed more light on it we have our colleagues Mariya Voronkevych (Shanghai) and Olga Yunitskaya (Beijing), who were there on the front lines of the pandemic.

### First response

#### **Olga Yunitskaya,**

Chief Expert, SIBUR's representative office in China (Beijing)

The spread of the virus varied from province to province, so the efforts to combat it differed too. Here, in Beijing, we never saw such strict quarantine measures as, say, in Wuhan. Nevertheless, no one was allowed to go outside without a mask.

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IT WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF JANUARY WHEN SHANGHAI INTRODUCED THE FIRST MEASURES – EVERYONE WAS TO WEAR A MASK. HAND SANITISERS AND PEOPLE WITH CONTACTLESS THERMOMETERS APPEARED EVERYWHERE.

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#### **Mariya Voronkevych,**

Executive Director of SIBUR International Trading (Shanghai)

It was in the middle of January when Shanghai introduced the first measures – everyone was to wear a mask. Hand sanitisers and people with contactless thermometers appeared everywhere. Just like in Beijing, there were no severe restrictions because the number of patients was low – about 550, including 140 imported cases. Almost 400 people recovered, and six died. However, all residents were obliged to wear masks in all public spaces. At some point, the mask supply ran out, but the government quickly remedied the situation. Those who attempted to price gouge were penalised.

From the very beginning, Chinese people were aware of how grave the threat was, so they took wearing masks seriously. Many had self-isolated even before the quarantine was officially announced.



*Queue in front of a store. People keep distance and have their temperature measured.*

## **Control measures**

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### **Olga Yunitskaya**

Just like in Shanghai, residential districts in Beijing are fenced off, which made it easier for the police to control the movement of the population. Nobody could enter a district without a permit issued by the authorities. In addition, there were mandatory temperature checks at the entry, and if above normal ( $37.2^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), the person was taken to hospital. The sale of fever medicines was banned to force people to go to hospital for testing rather than self-medicate.

The body temperature is also measured at supermarket and bank entrances. Office buildings impose very strict control with every entrant having to fill out the so-called health survey and state whether they have left Beijing in the last 14 days or visited Wuhan, specify their ID data, home address and phone number. After that, the software either grants permission to enter or denies access.



*Residential district entrance.*

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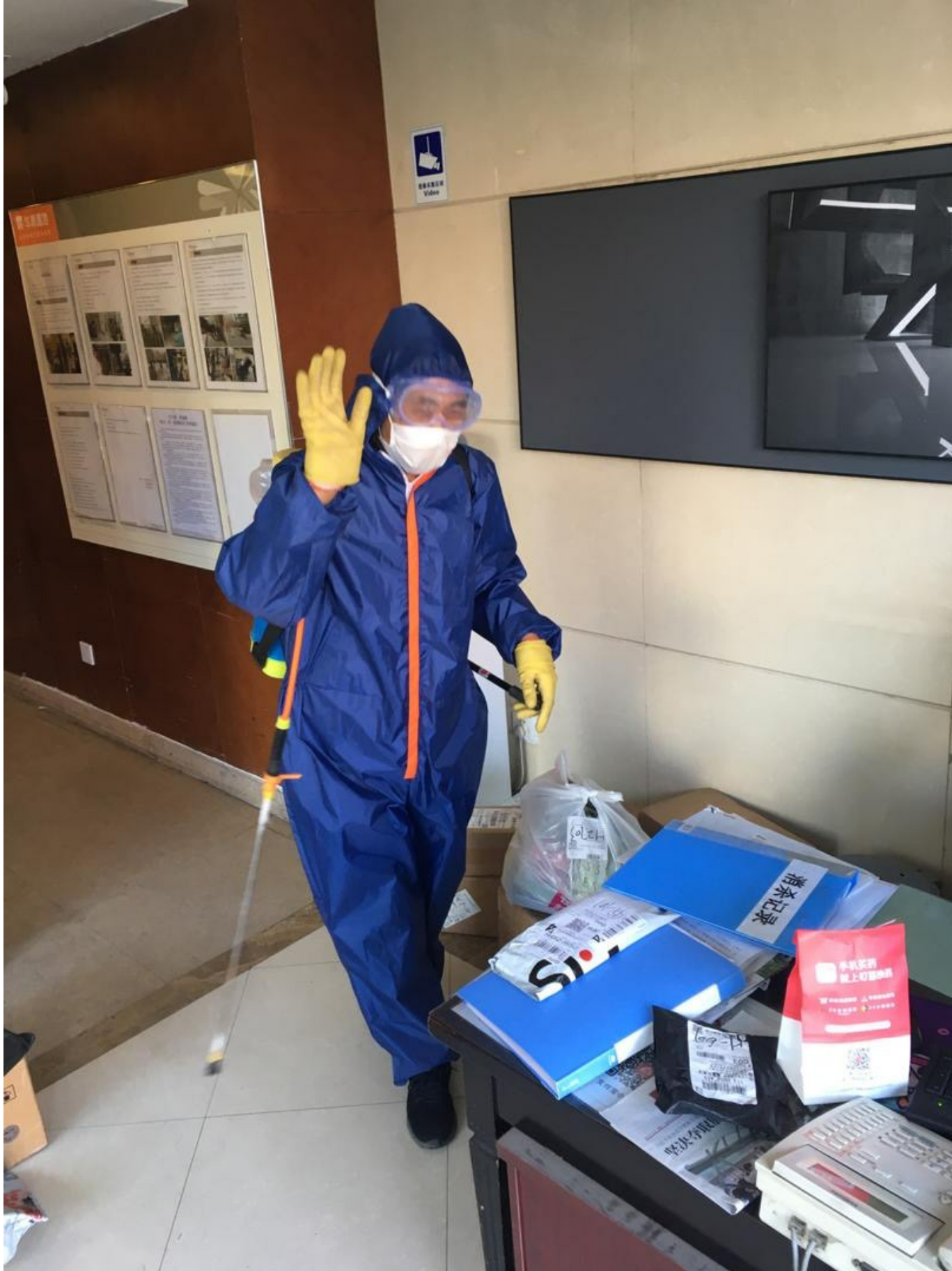
OFFICE BUILDINGS IMPOSE VERY STRICT CONTROL WITH EVERY ENTRANT HAVING TO FILL OUT THE SO-CALLED HEALTH SURVEY.

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### **Mariya Voronkevych**

Our office building introduced similarly strict control measures. A QR-based health code system has been deployed across the country. In Shanghai, nobody is allowed to enter a public space without such code, which contains the respective person's details (updated online), including the ID data and travel history over the last two weeks. In particular, it specifies whether you have visited a location severely affected by COVID-19. The QR code is frequently updated to inform the owner of the rules to be followed. A red code means the person must stay under quarantine, yellow means quarantine has not been finished, while green allows freedom of movement with no special restrictions.

By the way, even before the official declaration of an emergency, our office building introduced regular disinfections of lift buttons, door handles, and other commonly-touched surfaces. Our company must provide office employees with masks, hand sanitisers, and thermometers (although store supplies started to run dry as early as mid-January). We made lists of all employees who come to the office, including their ID details, temperature, and whether they have been to Wuhan or not. Until mid-March, these data were communicated to the administrators of the office building and then forwarded to local authorities. These and other measures have already been lifted. Supermarkets stopped measuring temperature, you need not wear a mask outside, but you still must put it on in a public space.



*Daily disinfection of common areas and residential districts*

## **Masks are important**

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THE QR CODE IS FREQUENTLY UPDATED TO INFORM THE OWNER OF THE RULES TO BE FOLLOWED. A RED CODE MEANS THE PERSON MUST STAY UNDER QUARANTINE, YELLOW MEANS QUARANTINE HAS NOT BEEN FINISHED, WHILE GREEN ALLOWS FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT WITH NO SPECIAL RESTRICTIONS.

## Olga Yunitskaya

Beijing introduced emergency measures on 25 January. In late March, the government made a statement that the outbreak had been contained and that some restrictions were now removed. That means we can go outside without a mask, provided we stay at least one metre away from other people. Nonetheless, most city dwellers keep wearing them.

There had been no shelter in place order, because everyone always wore a mask, glasses, and gloves before going out. If you have a mask on and your temperature is normal, no one will force you to stay home – you can go shopping or just have a walk. Air pollution is rather high here, so many Chinese people are in the habit of wearing a mask for protection. When that became mandatory, nobody really minded. It should also be noted that the Chinese are a rather law-abiding and socially responsible nation, so they were fast to catch on to the danger posed by the novel virus and the overall gravity of the situation. That is why they diligently followed all the instructions.

Actually, even without government compulsion, most people were willing to do everything in their power to protect their health. So, although no strict quarantine measures were introduced, Beijing residents avoided going outside, and the streets were empty as if the Spring Festival was still on. It was not until late March that the city began to come back to life. There were even traffic jams again, though most people still work from home.

I know that locations with higher infection rates saw much stricter measures. Cities were shut down. People were not allowed out of their homes for more than two hours, with outings limited to one family member. This affected our babysitter, who still has to stay in Hubei because of the quarantine.

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THE SALE OF FEVER MEDICINES WAS BANNED TO FORCE PEOPLE TO GO TO HOSPITAL RATHER THAN SELF-MEDICATE.

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## Mariya Voronkevych

Closed public spaces became the greatest challenge for many citizens. Eating out is part of Chinese people's daily life, and the closure of restaurants, cafes, parks, and gyms following the outbreak was a real let-down for the city dwellers. But despite the hardships, everybody adhered to the quarantine measures.

Courier delivery services still worked, albeit with some limitations: to avoid unnecessary contact, couriers left the packages at district gates rather than on doorsteps, and residents then picked them up. On top of that, the package included temperature info on the restaurant staff. In addition, no taxis were allowed on the residential districts. Public spaces gradually began to reopen, but just for a few hours. Supermarkets and restaurants still have to close at 8.00 pm.

Everyone who arrives from abroad has to be quarantined at a hospital, and no foreigners have been allowed to enter the country since 27 March.

*Photo by Olga Yunitskaya*