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Inside C2

# Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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## Tech workers bemoan China's crack-down on compulsory overtime

BEIJING, Sept 3 (Reuters) - The Chinese government's campaign to improve conditions for workers has spurred companies, particularly some of its hardest-driving tech giants, to cut down on long hours of compulsory overtime but not all employees are happy about it.

Some employees at TikTok-owner ByteDance were shocked to find their August paychecks slashed 17% after the company ended its policy of requiring its China-based staff to work a six-day week every second week.

"My workload hasn't actually changed," a product manager at ByteDance told Reuters, declining to be identified given the sensitivity of the topic. "But unfortunately the salary is lower."

For the past decade, Chinese tech firms were known for "996", a gruelling business culture that usually means work hours from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. six days a week. But 996 was also seen as a badge of honour and was hailed as a competitive advantage over U.S. and European rivals.

It was also a guarantee of high pay as Chinese law stipulates that employees are entitled to double pay for working overtime on weekends and triple pay for public holidays.

ByteDance declined to comment on the pay cuts which were widely discussed on social media. A separate company source said staff can still be paid overtime on weekends if they need to meet deadlines, adding that some employees in its gaming unit had done so recently.

Some workers in the tech sector began pushing back against 996 about two years ago - a movement that has gathered support from authorities keen to promoting socialist values and workers rights as they push through with wide-ranging regulatory



People walk past a logo of ByteDance, the China-based company which owns the short video app TikTok, or Douyin, at its office in Beijing, China July 7, 2020. REUTERS/Thomas

reforms. China's top court last month described 996 as illegal.

Other tech companies such as short-video platform Kuaishou (1024.HK) and food-delivery giant Meituan (3690.HK) have also cut compulsory weekend overtime recently.



In another boon for workers rights, ride-hailing giant Didi Global (DIDI.N) and e-commerce powerhouse JD.com (9618.HK) have set up government-backed unions in the past few weeks - a groundbreaking development in the tech sector where organised labour has to date been very rare.

Authorities are also working to mandate more

breaks for workers, especially in the food delivery sector where companies have been accused of pushing drivers to make tight deadlines at the expense of safety.

Meituan has said it will introduce such breaks. The southern city of Xiamen has also requested that companies implement a "20-minute break for every four hours of work" for delivery workers, the state-run People's Daily said this week.

Concerns remain though about unintended consequences.

"Won't this restrict their earnings?" said one user on China's Twitter-like Weibo, citing how these drivers are paid per order. "This will cause more problems, won't they drive even faster to deliver?" said another.

Reduced pay could also spell trouble for staff retention and the topic of whether companies should be raising salaries to compensate workers for their loss of overtime became one of the most viewed on Weibo this week, with over 120 million views.

"After receiving my paycheck this month, I want to know - are there other companies that still practice 996 in Shanghai?" posted a ByteDance employee.



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# LOCAL NEWS

## As COVID surges, more Florida school districts revolt against governor's mask

TAVARES, Fla., Sept 3 (Reuters) - In a scene replayed across the United States, angry parents and activists streamed into a meeting of the Florida's Lake County school board on Thursday where it considered whether to mandate mask-wearing for students and staff due to COVID.

Some opponents of the mask proposal brandished signs that read "Let Our Children Breathe." Even with Florida seeing a record number of coronavirus cases, one attendee called the pandemic "overblown." Another was escorted out by deputies after yelling at board members.

The proposal would require staff and students to wear masks for 14 days at schools with COVID positivity rates at or above 5%. But Florida's Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, effectively banned similar mandates in July.

Since DeSantis' order, more than a dozen Florida counties have rebelled and voted to require masks to protect students and teachers as the Delta variant sweeps across the state. This week, the state's Department of Education sanctioned two counties that passed school mask requirements.

The battle between DeSantis and the state's school systems echoes larger fights across the country. Other Republican-run states such as Arizona and Texas have also banned mask mandates in schools even as COVID cases have soared in their states, as parents and voters are sharply divided over safety measures and personal freedoms.

The pushback in Florida against the Republican governor initially was led by large urban school districts run by Democrats. But this week saw more conservative counties that backed Republican Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election also defying DeSantis and instituting their own mandates.

Earlier this week, populous Brevard County along Florida's east coast, which went for Trump over President Joe Biden by more than 16 percentage points in November, narrow-



ly voted to approve a 30-day school mask mandate. A day later, Hernando County, which supported Trump over Biden by almost 30 points, also passed a mandate, but one that allows parents to opt out. In Lake County near Orlando, which also strongly backed Trump, a school official said on Thursday that more than 1,000 students of the 36,000 in the district had tested positive for the virus. The board listened to more than three hours of public comment on the mask proposal then postponed a decision. Some 280 people spoke or sent emails on the issue, and two-thirds of them supported the idea, the Orlando Sentinel reported.

Still, proponents of a mask mandate were

booed and heckled by the crowd in attendance.

### ABSOLUTE CRISIS'

While the conflict centers on whether state or local governments are best equipped to make decisions on health and safety, it also has become a political challenge for DeSantis, whose state has once again become a COVID-19 hotbed.

After being widely praised last year when cases declined and the state's economy seemed revived, DeSantis has faced renewed criticism for his opposition to masks and employer vaccine

mandates. Florida on Aug. 26 saw a single-day record number of new cases of the virus - almost 28,000 - since the pandemic began.

A spokesperson for DeSantis, Christina Pushaw, defended the ban on school mandates, saying the governor is "protecting the rights of families and children from all levels of government overreach."

At the Brevard County meeting on Monday, Misty Belford, the chair of the school board who a month earlier had opposed a mask mandate, switched her vote and gave proponents a 3-2 majority.

## Editor's Choice



Houses and businesses are seen damaged in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida in Grand Isle, Louisiana. REUTERS/Adrees Latif



Damaged power lines and homes can be seen days after Hurricane Ida ripped through Grand Isle, Louisiana. Ida leveled Grand Isle, a town of 740 on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico, where officials said virtually every structure sustained damage and about 40% were destroyed. REUTERS/Leah Millis



A stop sign lies damaged at a street corner in Grand Isle, Louisiana. About three feet (one meter) of sand covered the island, rendering it uninhabitable. REUTERS/Adrees Latif



A partially buried fire hydrant can be seen days after Hurricane Ida ripped through Grand Isle, Louisiana. REUTERS/Leah Millis



Paul Delise surveys his destroyed home days after Hurricane Ida ripped through Grand Isle, Louisiana. REUTERS/Leah Millis



A U.S. flag flies over a damaged house in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida in Grand Isle, Louisiana. REUTERS/Adrees Latif

# Delta Variant Will Cause A Steep Rise In U.S. COVID Deaths, A New Model Shows

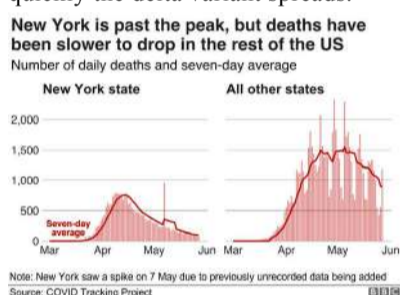


Front-line workers at a medical center in Aurora, Colo., gather for a COVID-19 memorial on July 15 to commemorate the lives lost in the coronavirus pandemic. (Photo/Hyoung Chang/MediaNews Group/Denver Post via Getty Images)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The current COVID-19 surge in the U.S. — fueled by the highly contagious delta variant — will steadily accelerate through the summer and fall, peaking in mid-October, with daily deaths more than triple what they are now. That's according to new projections released Wednesday from the COVID-19 Scenario Modeling Hub, a consortium of researchers working in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help the agency track the course of the pandemic. It's a deflating prospect for parents looking ahead to the coming school year, employers planning to get people back to the workplace and everyone hoping that the days of big national surges were over. "What's going on in the country with the virus is matching our most pessimistic scenarios," says Justin Lessler, an epidemiologist at the University of North Carolina who helps run the modeling hub. "We might be seeing synergistic effects of people becoming less cautious

in addition to the impacts of the delta variant. "I think it's a big call for caution," he adds. The group's latest projections combine 10 mathematical models from various academic teams to create an "ensemble" projection. It offers four scenarios for its projections — varying based on what percent of the population gets vaccinated and how quickly the delta variant spreads. **New York is past the peak, but deaths have been slower to drop in the rest of the US** Number of daily deaths and seven-day average. **What's going on in the country with the virus is matching our most pessimistic scenarios,"** says Justin Lessler, an epidemiologist at the University of North Carolina who helps run the modeling hub. "We might be seeing synergistic effects of people becoming less cautious



In the most likely scenario, Lessler says, the U.S. reaches only 70% vaccination among eligible Americans, and the delta variant is 60% more transmissible.

Each scenario also includes a range of how bad things could get — the very worst end of the range for the most likely scenario shows about 240,000 people getting infected and 4,000 people dying each day at the October peak, which would be almost as bad as last winter. Lessler notes that there's a lot of uncertainty in these projections and that how things actually plays out depends on lots of factors, including whether the vaccination campaign picks up steam and whether other mitigation measures are put back into place. "Changes in behavior that we didn't predict and big shifts in vaccination could very much change these results," Lessler says. But overall, the main projection shows a steady slope upwards to the peak in October, and then a steady slope back down.



"By the time you get to October, these resurgent epidemics have burned through a lot of the people who are susceptible," Lessler explains. At that point, "herd immunity starts kicking in a little more aggressively and we start to see things going down again." By January 2022, the model shows deaths coming back down to around the current level of about 300 per day. The take-home message of this latest model is that the pandemic isn't over yet and "we're not going to be able to land the plane without turbulence," says William Hanage, an epidemiologist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "How much turbulence will track with how many people are vaccinated in a given community." "I also strongly suspect that delta is highly prone to superspreading — if I am right, it might go off like a bomb in

some undervaccinated communities," Hanage adds. Public policy and behavior could still move the dial toward milder outcomes, Lessler says. "I think states should maybe be rethinking the speed at which they're removing mask mandates or social distancing," Lessler says. "That is something that — if you want to keep cases under control — certainly would have an impact."



**CDC Director Rochelle Walensky** Those measures would have to come from state or local leaders. Despite calls for the CDC to issue new mask guidelines, at a briefing Thursday, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky once again held firm. She emphasized that the guidelines have always said that unvaccinated people should wear masks indoors, too, if they want extra protection, especially in places where the virus is surging and there are a lot of unvaccinated people. But her main message was the same: Get vaccinated. With that, Lessler agrees. "If we got enough people vaccinated, we could even stop the delta variant in its tracks," he says. (Courtesy <https://www.npr.org/>)

**Related**  
**Delta Variant Danger Zones – The ICU Hospitalizations Map Shows Most Vulnerable States** States including Texas, Georgia, and Florida have more than 92% of their ICU beds occupied—and most of America isn't doing much better. Talk to any healthcare workers working on the front lines in the fight against COVID-19 and they'll likely tell you one of their worst fears is running out of physical space to treat those infected as the delta variant continues to rage across the U.S. Specifically, many are worried the country could run out of intensive care unit (ICU) beds if delta continues its spread unchecked. A lack of ICU beds means doctors may have

to be in the position of deciding which patients receive in-hospital treatment and which are left to deal with the disease at home. And if the latest data from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) is anything to go by, healthcare workers have a right to worry. America is running out of ICU beds.



The worry is that as delta spreads and cooler weather is around the corner, the number of COVID-19 patients needing an ICU bed could skyrocket. It would take less than a mere doubling of today's COVID-19 patients in ICU beds to fill the remaining free ones hospitals that report to the HHS still have. And if that happens, not only would COVID-19 patients needing ICU beds be out of luck, but so too could patients with other health conditions needing ICU beds.



Of course, ICU bed availability varies by state, and the HHS map shows how each state is faring on the individual level. Sadly, a majority of U.S. states have more than 70% of their ICU beds already taken up—and some of those are much more than 70%. Missouri, for example, has 88.5% of its ICU beds taken while Florida has a whopping 93% of all ICU beds already taken. Texas and Georgia also have over 92% of ICU beds occupied. (Courtesy <https://www.fastcompany.com/>)

# In 1957 A Flu Pandemic Hit The U.S., But Maurice Hilleman Was Ready With A Vaccine He Mass Produced In Only Months The Virologist Who Saved Millions Of Children—And Stopped A Pandemic



Virologist Maurice Hilleman with his research team at the Walter Reed Army Medical Research Institute in 1957. That year Hilleman and his team would identify and develop 40 million vaccine doses to combat a flu virus from Hong Kong. (PHOTO/ ED CLARK, LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY)

By Guest Writer Sydney Combs

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

In April 1957, a mysterious illness was making its way through Hong Kong. Medical workers encountered throngs of children with "glassy-eyed stares," and more than 10 percent of the city's population was infected with influenza. The scientific community stayed quiet, but American virologist Maurice Hilleman recognized the threat: A pandemic was brewing. Hilleman thought the disease was a new strain of influenza capable of spreading around the world. By the time the virus arrived in the U.S. in fall 1957, he was ready with a vaccine. His work prevented millions from contracting the deadly virus—and that's a small fraction of the people Hilleman would save over the course of his career.



Students sick with the 1957 "Asian flu" lie in

temporary cots set up in the student union building at the University of Massachusetts. More than 100,000 people in the U.S. died from the virus. (PHOTO/ BETTMANN, GETTY) Born in August 1919, at the height of the Spanish flu, Hilleman was raised on a farm near Miles City, Montana. During the Depression, he managed to get a job as an assistant manager at a J.C. Penney store and planned to spend the rest of his professional career with the company—until his older brother convinced him to apply to college. He went to Montana State University on a full scholarship, graduated first in his class in 1941—and was accepted to every graduate school he applied to. As a doctoral student in microbiology at the University of Chicago, Hilleman proved that chlamydia was actually a bacteria instead of a virus, a discovery that helped doctors treat the disease. Against his professor's wishes, Hilleman went into the pharmaceutical industry instead of academia because he believed

he'd be better positioned there to bring the benefits of his research to patients. By the end of his career, he would develop more than 40 vaccines that prevented disease and death throughout the world.



**The Father Of Modern Vaccines, Maurice Hilleman.**

**Heading off a pandemic** After four years with the E.R. Squibb pharmaceutical company in New Jersey, Hilleman transferred to the Walter Reed Army Medical Research Institute in Washington, D.C., to study respiratory illnesses and influenza outbreaks. There he proved that influenza viruses undergo mutations that allow them to bypass antibodies previously developed to the strain. This explained why one influenza vaccine didn't protect a person for life, as a smallpox or polio vaccine could. **FLU VIRUS 101**The influenza virus is a recurring nightmare, killing thousands of people each year. Learn how the virus attacks its host, why it's nearly impossible to eradicate, and what scientists are doing to combat it. Through this research, Hilleman became convinced that the virus in Hong Kong could be substantially different from existing strains, and thus could be deadly if it came to the United States or other nations. When he picked up a copy of The New York Times on April 17, 1957 and read about the situation in Hong Kong, he exclaimed, "My God. This is the pandemic. It's here!" The next day he asked the military to collect virus samples there. A month later, he received gargled saltwater from an ill Navy serviceman who had been to Hong Kong. Hilleman began incubating the virus and testing it against antibodies from hundreds of soldiers and civilians. He couldn't find a single person with antibodies to this strain of influenza. Hilleman sent samples of the new virus to other research organizations, which confirmed that only a few elderly citizens who had survived the 1889-1890 influenza pandemic had any antibody resistance. That meant nearly everyone was at risk of catching

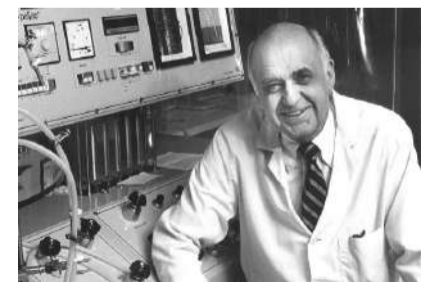
the new strain. "In 1957 we all missed it. The military missed it and the World Health Organization missed it," Hilleman later said in an interview.



**Boxes of Hilleman's vaccines for the 1957 flu are rushed by helicopter throughout the** (PHOTO/WALTER SANDERS/LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY)

Realizing how little time the country had to prepare, Hilleman contacted pharmaceutical manufacturers directly and asked them to make a vaccine from his samples. He also demanded that roosters that would otherwise have been killed be kept alive to fertilize enough eggs to prepare the vaccine. Even though his work had not yet been reviewed by the main U.S. vaccine regulatory agency, the Division of Biological Standards, the pharmaceutical companies agreed. Because regulations now are far tighter this type of workaround would be impossible today. Because of Hilleman's perseverance, 40 million doses of the vaccine had been created by the time the flu hit American shores in fall 1957. Ultimately, the virus killed 1.1 million people worldwide and an estimated 116,000 people in the United States. But the U.S. surgeon general at the time, Leonard Burney, said the virus would have infected millions more Americans had there been no vaccine. The U.S. military awarded Hilleman a Distinguished Service Medal for his work. "That's the only time we ever averted a pandemic with a vaccine," Hilleman recalled. **Out of the spotlight** Hilleman's success was in part due to his po-

sition at Merck, the pharmaceutical company he worked at for 47 years. He was given direct control over his research there, and with Merck's ample financial resources at their disposal, Hilleman and his team developed more than 40 vaccines for humans and animals. "There was money to spend to do what you needed to do [at Merck]. Money wasn't an object. You could do your research," Hilleman's second wife Lorraine Witmer once told Hilleman's biographer. By working in the private sector—the "dirty industry" as Hilleman joked—he was able to guide his research from the lab to the marketplace with his signature brashness. The pharmaceutical industry had its drawbacks, though, and at times prevented Hilleman from gaining public recognition for his work. "I thought that if my name appeared on the paper, or if I was the one put in front of the television cameras or radio microphones, people would think that I was selling something," Hilleman explained after his name was not included on the paper proving his hepatitis B vaccine was effective.



**Virologist Maurice Hilleman.** In the end, Hilleman didn't name a single discovery after himself. Hilleman and his team developed eight of the 14 vaccines currently recommended for children: measles, mumps, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, chickenpox, meningitis, pneumonia, and Haemophilus influenzae (Hib vaccine). The WHO estimates that the measles vaccine alone prevented 20.3 million deaths worldwide between 2000 and 2015. At the time of Hilleman's death, scientists in the field credited him with likely saving more people than any other scientist in the 20th century. "The scientific quality and quantity of what he did was amazing," Dr. Anthony Fauci told The New York Times in 2005. "Just one of his accomplishments would be enough to have made for a great scientific career." (Courtesy <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/>)