

Regarding current measures in response to COVID-19

4th February 2022

Oita Prefecture Novel Coronavirus Infection Countermeasure Headquarters
Oita Prefecture Emergency Socio-Economic Revitalisation Headquarters

Nine days have passed since the implementation of Semi-Emergency Coronavirus Measures in Oita Prefecture. Residents have refrained from leaving their homes as much as possible, and dining establishments, bars, and pubs have cooperated with regard to the shortening of business hours. Since the implementation of the above measures, not only has there been a sharp fall in infections arising from group dining situations, but also the occurrence of cluster infections resulting from group dining situations has been eliminated.

The new Omicron variant is highly transmissible. As such, please do not hesitate to take time off of work or school in the event you experience symptoms of any kind, however mild, in order to protect your loved ones. In spite of this guidance, the speed of both the transmission and onset of symptoms of the Omicron variant is extremely fast. People are therefore going to work or school without realising they are infected, and infection is spreading rapidly. The 500 new infections recorded on the day of publication is the highest it has been hitherto, and we are currently in a situation where, for 15 consecutive days, the number of new infections per week per 100,000 people is the highest it has ever been. This year alone we have recorded the outbreak of 71 cluster infections, with 17 of these occurring in schools, and a further 22 in childcare settings, nurseries, and other such settings; children are therefore at the centre of rapidly escalating infection rates. Consequently, 10 cluster infections have occurred in care homes as a result of chain infections facilitated through household units.

In order to protect children and the elderly, we must sever this chain, even momentarily, so that the Semi-Emergency Coronavirus Measures can be lifted. As such, even though the efforts we have requested of residents are ongoing, we wish to work towards the further strengthening of countermeasures.

1. Close observance of fundamental infection countermeasures

In this period of countermeasures against the new Omicron variant, prevention

measures such as ensuring continuous ventilation, observing the appropriate usage of masks, and avoiding overcrowding are vital. So far, most of the clusters confirmed within the prefecture occurred in situations where those involved were wearing masks, but not wearing them properly. When indoors, please wear non-woven fabric masks, which have a higher level of effectiveness in preventing infection, rather than masks made of cloth or urethane foam. Additionally, before wearing a mask, please bend the nose wire into the shape of a 'w'; fit it snugly against your nose; and ensure there is no gap between the mask and your nose. Please be careful when putting on and wearing masks, as if your nose is not properly covered by said mask, you cannot expect any effectiveness in terms of infection prevention.

Additionally, it has been reported that even if you wear non-woven masks properly, the probability of infection from conversations with an infected person within 50cm is around 14%. You can effectively eliminate the risk of infection when wearing a mask properly and keeping a distance of at least 1 metre from others. Though we have continued with a 'mask lifestyle' for two years now and you may believe yourself to be experienced enough to wear a mask properly, we request you maintain physical distance and once again ensure the effectiveness of your mask wearing.

2. Efforts over this period of concentrated short-term infection countermeasures

There is a 3-day holiday next week from 11th until 13th February. Based on the fact that it takes approximately three days between becoming infected with the Omicron variant and when you become symptomatic, we request that you treat this 3-day holiday weekend as a 'period of concentrated short-term infection countermeasures'. These short-term countermeasures include spending this long weekend holiday with your family and avoid mixing with other people, as the risk of infection from this is high. Alongside this, we request that all residents comply with the following measures over this long weekend holiday in order to prevent widespread infection. In doing so, we will be able to protect children and ensure they can resume normal school activities as quickly as possible.

I. Regarding the response at schools

All elementary, junior high, and high school students must suspend educational activities including club activities and extra-curricular activities.

Where possible, please refrain from utilising after school childcare clubs.

II. Regarding the response at pre-school education and childcare facilities

Where possible, please refrain from sending your child to pre-school or nursery.

We further request that employers give special consideration to employees raising children and allow them time off if necessary in order to keep children home from childcare facilities.

3. Vaccination

In preventing both the spread of the Omicron variant and the development of severe symptoms in infected persons, the third vaccination dose is of paramount importance. In care homes where there have been outbreaks of cluster infections, residents who had already been inoculated with the third vaccine dose only displayed mild symptoms. This highlights the effectiveness of the third vaccination dose in terms of severe symptom prevention.

The third vaccination dose will not only offer you protection, but will also help protect your loved ones too. Recently there has been considerable availability for vaccination appointments for the Moderna vaccine when compared with appointment availability for the Pfizer vaccine. Booking an early vaccination has therefore become a possibility. There is no difference in the effectiveness of the vaccination even if you receive a different vaccine from your first two doses.

Next week between the 10th and 13th February, the Prefectural Vaccination Centre will be administering vaccinations to those employed in the education sector, including elementary, junior high, and high school teaching staff, nursery staff, and preschool staff. Please note that to be eligible, your second vaccination dose must have been at least 6 months ago. It is not necessary to have received a vaccination ticket in the post, so we request that you take the initiative to utilise this service and get vaccinated with your third dose.

Please enjoy this 3-day holiday weekend with your family. Further, if you notice unusual changes in your health, for example the onset of a fever, discomfort in your throat, or a sore throat, etc, please do not hesitate to take time off of work or keep your children back from school in the week following the 3-day holiday. Though these new measures will cause yet more inconvenience, we request your understanding and cooperation in order for this new rise in infections to come to an end as quickly as possible.