

Regarding current measures in response to COVID-19

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1. The situation regarding infection rates

Infections within the prefecture are currently in a constant cycle of rising and falling. The sixth wave of infection, fueled by the Omicron variant, has led to more than 30,000 residents becoming infected in the four months since the beginning of the year.

Recently, infections have been hovering around 400 people daily. However, the third round of inoculations has been proceeding smoothly among the elderly. Hospital bed occupancy rates have therefore been gradually decreasing from peak usage, 46.3%, on 7th February to around 20%-25% today, and we have currently managed to avoid excessive strain on our medical facilities. On the other hand, even amongst the younger generations, we have seen hospitalisations with symptoms such as fever, sore throat, and nausea in those who are unvaccinated.

In addition, according to recent analysis, the Omicron sub-variant BA. 2 now makes up 46.8% of cases. We must not let our guard down. Last year, infections skyrocketed after a long holiday period. This time of year also brings the coming and going of many people. So that we do not invite a marked increase in infections to our prefecture, we ask all residents for their understanding and cooperation with respect to the points listed below.

2. Close observance of fundamental infection countermeasures

As COVID-19 is spread through the air, constant ventilation is absolutely crucial. The weather has also improved recently, so ensure that you have ample ventilation when inside, such as by always keeping at least two windows open that are on different sides of the room. Further, please ensure continuous ventilation when moving around via public transport and cars. In terms of mask-wearing, please ensure you choose ones made from non-woven fabrics, as these are highly effective in infection prevention. Please also make sure that you fit the mask tightly to your nose so that there is no gap.

In addition, in order to prevent transmission of the virus, when talking with others, even when outdoors, wear a mask or maintain a distance of at least two metres. As temperatures are getting warmer, masks are unnecessary when jogging, walking, or walking to work, so long as you are not talking with other people.

3. Dining out

Now is also a time of year that many will be able to visit and dine out with relatives and friends they have not seen in quite a while. When dining in a group, please ensure that you choose dining establishments that closely follow infection countermeasures, such as providing apt ventilation, certified under the 'Reassurance is Appetising PLUS' (安心は美味しいプラス *anshin wa oishii purasu*) scheme. Furthermore, ensure that you avoid overcrowding, such as by keeping only four people to a table.

In addition, remember to continue to follow fundamental infection countermeasures such as wearing a mask when talking, staying for as short a time as possible, and not moving seats. Have fun, but please dine responsibly.

4. Outings and Holidays

During the long holiday, you will also have more chances to go out with your family and friends. When going out or on holiday, be sure to avoid crowded spaces and mixing with other people.

Remember, 'Vaccination before Vacation'. In order to protect you and your loved ones, we highly recommend getting a booster vaccine or COVID test before leaving on holiday. Furthermore, the 'New Oita Travel Discount' (新しいおおいた旅割 *atarashii oota tabiwari*) will be extended from its original ending date of 28th April. It will now also be valid for use from 9th May to 31st May, given evidence of a third COVID-19 vaccine dose or negative result on a COVID-19 test. 29 more free test facilities have opened within the prefecture as well, for a total of 81.

In addition to the 'New Oita Travel Discount' available for trips within the prefecture, be sure to use discounts available from other prefectures in Kyushu, relax, and enjoy your travels.

5. Vaccination

At the current point in time, the most decisive factor in preventing the spread of COVID-19 is vaccination. Within the prefecture, more than 80% of the elderly have received their third dose, and new cases in the elderly have dropped to nearly a third of what they were at their peak. The effect the vaccine has on preventing symptoms is quite evident.

At the same time, there have been few cases of young persons developing serious symptoms with the Omicron variant, and many are still hesitating to get the vaccine. There are reports that one in four people who have been infected with COVID-19 still experience aftereffects such as fatigue and hair loss even six months after infection. When considering the risk of these aftereffects as well, we highly recommend vaccination. By

the end of this month, over 90% of all vaccination tickets will have been delivered. When you receive a ticket, please reserve and receive your third vaccination dose as soon as possible and enjoy your holiday.

There also appears to have been some concern surrounding the Moderna vaccine, with some avoiding it, fearing side effects. However, it actually has some advantages over the Pfizer vaccine in preventing symptoms. It is also possible to receive the vaccine without waiting at all at Moderna vaccination locations.

In addition, please take into consideration that it is now possible for children from age five to eleven to receive the vaccine at pediatric medical institutions throughout the prefecture.

6. Conclusion

At the current point in time, it is difficult to see when the current outbreak will settle down. However, the vaccine and fundamental countermeasures such as masks and proper ventilation continue to be as effective as ever. Please continue to keep in mind infection countermeasures and enjoy your holiday with your friends and family.