

Current Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

March 1, 2023

Oita Prefecture Novel Coronavirus Countermeasures Headquarters
Oita Prefecture Emergency Socio-Economic Revitalization Headquarters

1. Situation Regarding Infections

The 8th wave of infections for COVID-19 started in November of last year and reached a never-before-seen peak of 3,998 new infections per day and 75.8% hospital bed utilization by January 6. There were many worries about this wave, but thanks to the due diligence and understanding we have received from all residents, today only saw 145 new infections and the current hospital bed utilization rate is 12.5%—a significant decrease. It is clear that infections have been decreasing all across the country as well, and from these trends, we have decided to lower the infection level for Oita Prefecture to Level 1 (a lull in infections). From the bottom of our hearts, we would once again like to thank residents as well as all hard-working medical workers who toiled day and night to make this possible. In addition, due to the decrease in admittances to recuperation facilities that has come from the decrease in infections, recuperation facilities will be reduced to one building within Oita City in order to reduce the burden on nurses and other managing staff.

2. Masks

Recently, the national government has announced it will be easing mask-wearing guidelines. Conforming with this, the Prefecture will be doing the following in regard to masks.

(1) From March 13, wearing masks will be an individual choice. However, for schools we ask that everyone continue to follow current guidelines and use masks as the situation demands until March 31. Masks will not be required in schools starting April 1.

(2) In order to make sure infection doesn't spread to the elderly or others with a high risk of contracting serious symptoms, wearing masks is still highly recommended when going to the doctor, visiting medical facilities, and visiting other facilities for the elderly, as well as during rush hours when on trains or buses. To that effect, you may be asked to wear a mask by medical facilities, facilities for the elderly, or other organizations. We ask for your cooperation and understanding on this matter.

(3) "Safety is Appetizing PLUS" (*anshin wa oishii purasu*) certified restaurants will continue to ask for patrons to use hand sanitizer and be required to provide apt ventilation. However, they will no longer be required to ask patrons to wear masks starting March 13.

(4) We ask that all residents keep in mind that wearing or not wearing a mask is a personal choice and to respect other people's decisions in the matter, not forcing others to wear masks nor to take off masks against a person's will.

3. Fundamental Infection Countermeasures

Guidelines in regard to masks may be undergoing the above changes, but other fundamental countermeasures will be remaining the same. We ask that everyone continue to keep apt ventilation in rooms, wash their hands, and avoid the “Three Cs.” In addition, we ask that those who have received a voucher for the Omicron booster to get inoculated as soon as possible. For the elderly especially, the booster lowers chances of death and severe symptoms, so it is highly recommended to get it immediately.

4. Restimulating Socioeconomic Activity

Recently the social economy has been impoverished not only by COVID-19, but also rising energy and material costs, but at the current point, the economy within Oita Prefecture is recovering. In order to make sure these trends continue upward, promoting cost pass-throughs and raising wages in response to rising prices, while also returning the prefecture’s economy to a private-sector-led autonomous path of growth is absolutely essential. To this effect, in order to encourage consumer spending, a third round of premium vouchers, totaling ¥13 billion will be sold by municipalities as they are ready to do so. In addition, the popular second round of the “New Oita Travel Discount” will be extended so that stays at hotels may be scheduled until March 31. Furthermore, the Prefecture will be continuing to provide financial and budgetary support measures in order to combat raising prices and help raise wages. Besides this, we also plan to continue to promote operations that concern the prefecture’s growth into the coming fiscal year, such as: digital transformation to make up for a lack of workers and to raise productivity, expanding our base for startups, strengthening the tourism industry by using destination campaigns and other measures, aiming for carbon neutrality through “Green Transformation (GX)” and the “Avatar” project, and finally making efforts to expand into cutting-edge technology, including into space.

5. Conclusion

Continuing on, we will do our utmost to reinvigorate the social economy and coexist with COVID while using well-balanced infection countermeasure policies.