

Current Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

April 25, 2023

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

1. Situation Regarding Infections

Since March 15, the lull in new infections of COVID-19 has continued, with there having been fewer than 100 new infections per day within the prefecture. The hospital bed utilization rate has also gone below 5% in the past month and is now stable, staying at low percentages. This is once again due to the understanding and cooperation we have received from every resident, to whom we give our heartfelt thanks.

2. Downgrade to “Class 5”

From these developments, it has been decided that on May 8, the placement of COVID-19, as according to the Act on Infectious Diseases, will be changed to a Class 5 infectious disease. This is the same class as the seasonal flu. As a prefecture, we will take every precaution to make sure that residents feel at ease while going through this large change.

Firstly, the medical care system. With the cooperation of medical associations and others, we will be greatly expanding the number of medical facilities that can accept inpatients from 57 hospitals to 130 starting on May 8. We are also planning to expand the number of outpatient facilities from the current 563 locations to 650 by the end of September. This expansion will allow for persons to be admitted to more hospitals. Due to this, as well as due to quarantines becoming unnecessary for COVID patients, the current recuperation facility will be closed on May 8.

Furthermore, a special consultation line will be established on May 8 for any person who does not know what facility to consult, or for any COVID-19 positive person whose condition suddenly deteriorates. Nurses and other staff will be available to consult and answer questions 24 hours a day.

In addition, restrictions on movement such as recommended hospitalization of infected persons, restrictions on their employment, and self-quarantine for those who were in close contact with infected persons will be abolished. However, those who do test positive

are advised to stay home and recover for around five days. Please continue to take precautions so that others do not become infected.

3. Response Measures for Elderly Care and Other Facilities

Even after COVID-19 is moved to Class 5, the elderly, people with underlying medical conditions, and those who are pregnant or nursing will still be at risk of serious illness and will continue to need to take extra precautions.

The average age for those who died in the 8th wave of infection in Oita Prefecture (as of yesterday) was 84.9 years old, showing that proper countermeasures are particularly important for the elderly.

For this reason, the prefecture will continue focused testing on elderly care or other facilities where infections have been confirmed, guiding facilities through measures such as making zones when clusters occur, and providing financial support for facilities' medical treatment systems.

At the same time, the health center will continue to provide consultation so as to find medical institutions that will cooperate in dispatching medical personnel to any elderly care or other facilities.

4. Vaccine

Vaccinations will begin from May 8 in order to prevent the development of serious symptoms in people such as the elderly, those with pre-existing medical conditions, and medical workers.

In addition, there are plans for a vaccine for everyone five years of age and older to be introduced in September.

Vaccines will continue to be free-of-charge. We ask that anyone who wishes to get a vaccine to please do so.

5. Fundamental Infection Countermeasures

Wearing a mask is now a personal choice. However, it is still recommended to wear a mask in medical institutions, elderly care facilities, and congested buses/trains in order to prevent spreading infection to the elderly and others with a high risk of developing serious symptoms.

In addition, please continue to ensure proper ventilation and wash your hands, as they are effective as fundamental countermeasures against infectious diseases.

6. Restimulating Socioeconomic Activity

In order to continue to improve the recovering economy of Oita Prefecture, 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, a third round of premium vouchers (worth ¥13 billion) and the second round of the "New Oita Travel Discount" (possible stays now extended up until 7/20) will be used to promote spending throughout all areas of the prefecture.

In addition, in order to ensure the success of the Fukuoka-Oita Destination Campaign that will be held next spring, we will create a National Advertising and Sales Promotion Council to promote our prefecture's unique appeal to travel agencies and other organizations all across the country.

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 our tourism industry in preparation for the full recovery of inbound travelers, aiming for carbon neutrality through "Green Transformation (GX)," and finally making efforts to expand into cutting-edge technology, including using drones to tackle local problems and continuing to create Oita Space Port.

7. Conclusion

Over the past three years, we have placed many undue burdens on the residents of Oita Prefecture. We truly thank you for your understanding and cooperation. As infections have calmed down, with the transition of COVID-19 to a Class 5 infectious disease on May 7, the Novel Coronavirus Countermeasures Headquarters and Emergency Socio-Economic Revitalization Headquarters of Oita Prefecture will both be shut down. However, the Prefecture will continue do our utmost to reinvigorate the social economy and coexist with COVID while using well-balanced infection countermeasure policies.