

Expert Meeting on the Novel Coronavirus Disease Control

Analysis of the Response to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Recommendations

(May 1, 2020)

Summary

1. Introduction

2. Infection situation

- Nationwide, the number of newly infected patients per day, which was close to 700 around April 10, has most recently decreased to around 200. (The cumulative number of infections was approximately 14,000 as of April 29.)

We are beginning to see results from the set of measures taken, with the number of new infections showing a downward trend. However, compared to the rapid speed at which the infections increased after March 20, the rate of decline is slow. Furthermore, the movement of people from metropolitan areas has spread infections to rural areas, and the speed at which infections are decreasing in rural areas is slower than that in Tokyo.

- The number of newly infected patients per day in Tokyo was approaching 250 on April 9, but has fallen to less than 100 recently and is on a downward trend. Although the rate of decline in Tokyo is faster than that shown in nationwide data, it is still slow compared to the speed at which it increased.

The number of infections arising from restaurant businesses with accompanying services and operating at night is decreasing, while outbreaks in medical institutions and welfare facilities as well as infections within families are increasing.

- As described above, citizens are changing their behavior, which is producing results, and the number of new infections is clearly showing a downward trend nationwide. However, we are still seeing a considerable number of new infections, and the level of new infections has not decreased to that of early to mid-March when the number of infections began rising.
- While the number of PCR and other tests being conducted is limited compared to other countries, some question why it can be said that the number of infections is decreasing. Since we have been conducting PCR and other tests mainly when doctors decide it is necessary, or for those who have been in close contact with an infected person, the total number of infected persons is not known. However, with the number of cases testing positive decreasing nationwide while the number of tests conducted gradually rises, and the doubling time becoming longer in places such as Tokyo, there is no doubt that the number of new infections is on a downward trend.
- Regarding the impact on delivery of medical care by the health system, even with the number of new

infections on a downward trend, patients with severe symptoms requiring mechanical ventilators tend to stay in hospital for a long time and their numbers are not showing a tendency to fall. Therefore, the load on medical institutions due to hospitalized patients is expected to continue for some time, and the situation of an over-stretched medical system will likely ease only gradually compared to the slowing rate of new infections.

Thus, it is suggested that the measures in place need to continue for the time being to maintain the decreasing trend in new infections until the future spread of infections becomes unlikely. Moreover, it is also important to quickly improve the delivery of medical care.

3. State of behavior modification

- We are currently using "contact frequency" to evaluate the "modification of contact behavior" that can reduce the number of new infections.
- In regions such as Tokyo (Shibuya station) and Osaka (Namba station), the achievement status differs from one age group to another. Namely, the contact frequency among young people in their teens and twenties, who have been affected by closures of educational institutions such as universities, decreased by more than 80%. Daytime contact frequency of people in their thirties is expected to have fallen by the amount corresponding to the spread of teleworking, but has not reached 80 percent.

Movement across prefectures has decreased by 30 to 50 percent in many areas. As long as commuting to city centers continues, the degree of decline in contact frequency among the productive population will be small.

4. Future outlook

(1) Expected duration of measures needed in the future

- There are some good signs towards developing treatment, including early diagnosis and prevention of severe symptoms. However, considering the infection situation in other countries and the response needed, continuous measures are needed in line with the state of domestic infections.

(2) Need for measures in response to the regional spread

- Under the current state of emergency, unprecedented measures are in place including self-restraint from going out and closure of certain businesses. These measures have shifted the number of new infections in Japan toward a general downward trend.
- However, if infections begin to spread once again regionally or nationwide, the systems for delivering medical care could face renewed pressure. Thus, the current framework should continue for the time being. As the infection situation differs by region:
 - (i) In regions where the infection situation is severe, it will be necessary to continue the "request for

thorough behavior modification" in general until the number of new infections decreases to a certain level.

- (ii) In regions where the number of new infections is limited and the measures can be relaxed to a certain degree, transition to a new lifestyle that prevents the spread of infections will be needed to prepare for the long haul, as infections could spread once again.

(3) Considerations for regions continuing to require a "request for thorough behavior modification"

- Lengthening the measures brings with it concerns about serious negative effects on the lives of citizens and "voluntary-restraint fatigue." Since it is necessary to ask citizens to make a sustained effort to halt the spread of infections, we need to consider gradually easing some of the restrictions, especially for some activities for which there is a social need and for which the risk of infection can be sufficiently reduced by various means. For example, we must examine the handling of schools and parks.

(4) How to determine whether to continue or ease "requests for thorough behavior modification"

- Under the condition that infection is limited to a certain extent (epidemiological situation) and the systems for delivering medical care are secure (medical situation), a comprehensive decision will be made that takes the following factors into account.
 - (i) Infection situation (epidemiological situation)
 - The number of newly infected patients, etc. (newly infected patients, doubling time, percentage of infected patients whose transmission route has not been identified) are at a sufficiently low level.
 - PCR and other tests that are necessary can be performed promptly.
 - (ii) Systems for delivering medical care
 - A system is established for sharing roles among medical institutions and coordinating patient acceptance.
 - A system has been developed for promptly grasping and sharing the operational status of hospital beds (including the states of patients and availability of hospital beds).
 - Lodging facilities have been secured for patients with mild symptoms.

5. Future measures

- In regions where the number of new infections is limited and the measures can be relaxed to a certain degree, a new lifestyle must be established as a long-haul measure against the novel coronavirus disease to avoid another wave of infections. We must bear in mind that when another wave occurs, a "request for thorough behavior modification" will be needed again.

(1) Popularizing a new lifestyle to prevent the spread of infections

- For a society where we live together with the novel coronavirus, it is essential that we strive to avoid the "3Cs" and continue basic measures to prevent infection such as handwashing and keeping physical distance.
- It is important to reduce contact while working and in the workplace through teleworking, staggering commuting hours, video conferencing, etc., in addition to basic measures to prevent infection.
- Cautionary measures, including cancellations and postponement, will be necessary for nationwide and large-scale events.

(2) Promoting measures for efficient counter-cluster measures

- With the rapid increase in infections, the counter-cluster approach is becoming difficult. Assuming that the number of infections will decrease to a certain level, we must work on the following in order to enable more efficient active epidemiological investigations and prevent a sudden increase in infections.
 - (i) Provide full support for public health centers, including more efficient infection-control activities.
 - (ii) Expand and train human resources engaged in active epidemiological investigations.
 - (iii) Utilize ICT to detect those who have been in close contact with infected people and to monitor their health conditions (e.g. close-contact tracking app).

(3) Expanding systems for delivering medical care

- The primary goal is to avoid collapse of the healthcare system, which would result in the loss, due to an increase in infections, of lives that would normally be saved, by:
 - (i) Securing the sharing of functions among medical institutions (such as designating priority medical institutions) and coordination of functions within prefectures, coordinating patient transfers, securing lodging facilities for patients with mild symptoms, etc.
 - (ii) Establishing a system that can respond to a sudden increase in infections while ensuring that treatment of patients with other diseases is not greatly impacted.

(4) Expanding PCR and other tests

- When considering easing the "request for thorough behavior modification" to a certain extent, it is important to improve the ability to detect infected patients early. We need to make every effort to allow use of a more convenient test (such as rapid diagnostic test kits) in the medical field.

(5) Vaccinations, medications, etc.

- Vaccinations, treatment methods, medications, and severity markers must be developed as soon as possible.

(6) Handling of schools

- As of April 22, 95% of elementary and junior high schools and 97% of high schools are temporarily closed nationwide. However, considering the importance of securing learning opportunities for students and the fact that this infectious disease requires ongoing measures, we need to examine ways to restart school activities while reducing the risk of infections and their spread at school as much as possible.

(7) Response regarding social issues

- As the measures are extended, while preventing the spread of infection is the top priority, we must also find ways to permit socio-economic activities. The Government must examine the issue while taking into account the impact of continuing measures for the long term on the lives of citizens, the economy and society in general. Additionally, we must keep an eye on the social issues that must be dealt with at the same time.
 - The impact on mental health, violence from spouses, and child abuse as a result of having to refrain from going out for long periods
 - Bankruptcy, unemployment, and suicide due to business closures, etc.
 - Discrimination and harmful rumors against infected patients, their families, medical workers, etc.
 - The lives of elderly people living alone, single-parent households, etc.
 - Maintaining the health of and securing care services for elderly people
 - Spreading awareness about proper infection prevention in cremation, etc.

6. Conclusion

- Thanks to the cooperation and understanding of citizens towards behavior modification, the number of new infections is gradually decreasing. However, the medical system remains stretched. We will collect and analyze the latest data and will announce the details of necessary measures again in a few days' time.