

## Chapter 1 Response to the COVID-19 Infection

### 1. COVID-19 pandemic

The first patient of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was confirmed in China in December 2019, and within a short period of time it has spread all over the world. In Japan, since the first patient was confirmed in January 2020, the number of patients has increased and made various influences on citizens' lives.

### 2. Response of the Government (Establishment of Novel Coronavirus Response Headquarters, etc.)

#### (1) Facts about the COVID-19

In Japan, the first infected person was confirmed on January 15, 2020, and as of the end of April 2021, the number of positive cases was 588,900 and the number of deaths was 10,226 (domestic cases).

Under the declaration of a state of emergency from April to May 2020, 13 prefectures, namely Tokyo, Osaka, Hokkaido, Ibaraki, Saitama, Chiba, Kanagawa, Ishikawa, Gifu, Aichi, Kyoto, Hyogo, and Fukuoka prefectures, were required to take intensive measures to prevent the spread of infection. Therefore, on March 28, 2020, under the Basic Policies for Novel Coronavirus Disease Control (hereinafter referred to as the “Basic Policies”), which defines the basic measures against COVID-19 in accordance with the Act on Special Measures for Pandemic Influenza and New Infectious Diseases Preparedness and Response (hereinafter referred to as the “Act on Special Measures”), the government designated these 13 prefectures as the “specified warning prefectures” among the specified prefectures (prefectures belonging to the area subject to the declaration of a state of emergency) and promoted measures against COVID-19 in these prefectures.

In addition, in prefectures other than the specified warning prefectures, clusters have been observed in areas other than urban areas because of the movement of people from urban areas, and the spread of infection has been observed. Therefore, the government urged all prefectures to take measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by designating all prefectures as areas where emergency measures should be implemented.

As a result, the number of newly reported cases decreased nationwide. It was also confirmed that the number of patients with severe cases was on a downward trend. Furthermore, progress was made in securing hospital beds and the medical care delivery system. Later, on May 25, 2020, all prefectures ceased to fall under the zone where emergency measures should be implemented, and the declaration of lifting the state of emergency was issued on the same day.

The number of newly reported cases, which had started to decrease since the summer, turned

to increase from the end of October. In December, the number of newly reported cases continued to be the highest ever, mainly in the Tokyo metropolitan area, and there were areas where the healthcare provision system was under pressure. In light of this infectious situation and the burden on the medical care delivery system as well as the public health system, on January 7, 2021, the Head of the Response Headquarters declared a state of emergency based on the Act on Special Measures for 31 days from January 8 to February 7, 2021, covering Tokyo, Saitama, Chiba, and Kanagawa prefectures. Subsequently, on January 13, 2021, the State of Emergency Area was changed to add Tochigi, Gifu, Aichi, Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo, and Fukuoka prefectures.

On February 2, 2021, based on the Act on Special Measures, the State of Emergency Area was changed to 10 prefectures, namely Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa, Gifu, Aichi, Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo, and Fukuoka prefectures, and the period should be implemented in these areas was extended until March 7, 2021. The state of emergency period in these areas was extended to March 7, 2021.

The government submitted to the Diet a bill to partially amend the Act on Special Measures, including the establishment of the “Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Influenza and New Infectious Diseases” (hereinafter referred to as the “Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases”) in order to strengthen measures against COVID-19 infection. The bill was enacted on February 3, 2021, and came into effect on February 13, 2021.

On February 26, it was decided to change the State of Emergency Area to four prefectures (Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, and Kanagawa) on and after March 1, based on the Act on Special Measures. Subsequently, on March 18, as the four prefectures were no longer included in the State of Emergency Area, the lifting of the state of emergency was declared on March 21.

It was decided that, based on the “Response to Novel Coronavirus Infections after the Lifting of the State of Emergency” (prepared by the Response Headquarters on March 18, 2021), and while continuing socio-economic activities, efforts would be made to prevent the spread of the infection again and to control the occurrence of serious illnesses and deaths as much as possible.

On April 1, 2021, due to the high necessity to prevent the spreading of the infection again, a public notice was issued in accordance with the Act on Special Measures, setting the period for implementing the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases to 31 days from April 5 to May 5, 2021, and the priority areas as Miyagi, Osaka and Hyogo Prefectures.

On April 9, 2021, a public notice was issued to the effect that, based on the Act on Special Measures, the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases were applied to Tokyo, Kyoto, and Okinawa Prefectures from April 12 onwards; the period during which the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases should be implemented in Tokyo metropolitan

area would be 30 days from April 12 to May 11, 2021; and the period in Kyoto and Okinawa Prefectures 24 days from April 12 to May 5, 2021.

On April 16, 2021, a public notice was issued to the effect that, based on the Act on Special Measures, the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases were applied to Saitama, Chiba, Kanagawa, and Aichi Prefectures from April 20 onwards, and that the period during which the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases should be implemented in these four prefectures would be 22 days from April 20 to May 11, 2021.

The number of newly reported cases continued to increase from early March 2021, mainly in large urban areas, and the number of serious cases also increased. In addition, there was an increase in the number of people infected with mutant strains that were feared to have an impact, and were rapidly replacing conventional strains.

In light of this situation, on April 23, 2021, the Head of the Response Headquarters declared a state of emergency again in accordance with the Act on Special Measures. The period was 17 days from April 25 to May 11, 2021, and the State of Emergency Areas were Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, and Hyogo Prefectures.

Also, on April 23, 2021, a public notice was issued to the effect that (i) based on the Act on Special Measures, the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases were applied to Ehime Prefecture; (ii) Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, and Hyogo Prefectures, which were designated as the State of Emergency Area, were excluded from the areas to which the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases were applied on and after April 25; and (iii) the period during which the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases should be implemented in Miyagi Prefecture would be changed from April 5 to May 5, 2021 to April 5 to May 11, 2021, and the period in Okinawa Prefecture would be changed from April 12 to May 5, 2021 to April 12 to May 11, 2021, and the period in Ehime Prefecture would be changed from April 12 to May 5, 2021 to April 12 to May 11, 2021.

On May 7, 2021, due to the high level of the number of new positive cases, mainly in large urban areas, and the tightness of the medical care delivery system, changes were made to add Aichi and Fukuoka prefectures to the State of Emergency Area from May 12 onward, and the period during which emergency measures should be implemented was extended to May 31, 2021. It was also decided to extend the state of emergency period until May 31, 2021.

Also on May 7, 2021, a public notice was issued to the effect that (i) the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases were applied to Hokkaido, Gifu, and Mie Prefectures on and after May 9, and Miyagi Prefecture was excluded from the areas to which the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases were applied on and after May 12; (ii) the period during which the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases should be implemented in Hokkaido, Gifu, and Mie Prefectures would be extended to 23 days from May

9 to May 31, 2021; and (iii) the period in Saitama, Chiba, Kanagawa, Ehime, and Okinawa Prefectures would be extended to May 31, 2021.

## (2) General policy for dealing with COVID-19

Based on the recognition that measures against COVID-19 are a critical issue in crisis management, the Government has been vigorously engaged in measures to protect citizens' lives, including border control measures, prevention of spread, and provision of medical care. Due to the sporadic outbreaks of increasing numbers of patients with unknown routes of infection in Japan and the spread of infection in some areas, the Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare reported to the Prime Minister that there is a high possibility of the spread of COVID-19, based on the Act on Special Measures, on March 26, 2020. On the same day, the Response Headquarters in accordance with the Act on Special Measures was established.

Then, on March 28, 2020, based on the Act on Special Measures, the Basic Measures Policy was decided and various measures have been taken.

Subsequently, the Basic Policies were revised in response to the infection situation, and in the revision of May 7, 2021, the following general policy was published regarding the response to COVID-19: (1) More effective infection prevention measures will be taken based on the experience of the past period of spread of infection and the findings of various studies at home and abroad; (2) In the state of emergency area, measures to prevent infection will be strengthened for eating and drinking places, which are the main starting point for the spread of infection, and given the increase in the number of people infected with mutated strains, thorough infection prevention measures will be taken, such as efforts to control the flow of people in order to reduce opportunities for human-to-human contact; (3) In the areas to which the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases were applied, during the period and in the areas specified by the prefectural government, effective measures should be thoroughly implemented in places where the risk of infection is high and the main starting point for the spread of infection, such as eating and drinking places; (4) In other areas where the re-expansion of infection is recognized, the Government and prefectural governments should work closely together to implement focused and intensive PCR testing and requests to shorten business hours, and to promptly take effective and enhanced infection control measures, such as the flexible implementation of the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases; (5) To prevent the spread of infection, the Government will encourage the response to “new lifestyles” and avoidance of “five situations” that may increase the risk of infection, as well as encourage businesses and related organizations to implement industry-specific guidelines and evolve based on scientific findings; (6) Through appropriate infection prevention measures and economic and employment measures, to make possible a sustainable balance between

preventing the spread of infection and maintaining socio-economic activities; (7) Prompt vaccination will be promoted to prevent the onset of COVID-19 and to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries as much as possible; (8) In the State of Emergency Areas and areas to which the Priority Measures for Preventing the Spread of Diseases were applied, every effort will be made to secure the medical care provision system, and in other areas as well, a medical care provision system that can function reliably at the time of the spread of infection should be established, taking care to ensure that a series of patient responses, from “consultation, examination and testing” to “adjustment and transfer to a place of treatment” to “transfer, discharge, and release,” are carried out smoothly and that hospital beds and overnight care facilities are used to the maximum extent.

### 3. Main measures on persons with disabilities (as of April 2021)

#### (1) Welfare for persons with disabilities

The various services provided by social welfare facilities, including welfare service offices for persons with disabilities, are indispensable for the continuation of the lives of service users and their families, and it is important that the necessary services are continuously provided to users on the premise of adequate infection prevention measures. Therefore, the MHLW requested the local public entities on taking measures to prevent COVID-19 from spreading at social welfare facilities. They include considerations in the event of a person is infected, appropriate management of hygiene products, rewarding the staff, arrangement of proper facilities, equipment, and operational standard of welfare services for persons with disabilities and information on responses after the declaration of a state of emergency and so on.

As support for welfare service providers for persons with disabilities, the ministry provided various allowances to establishments where infected persons occurred, subsidies for additional costs such as disinfection costs and the costs of securing personnel, and benefits for staff who come into contact with service users.

In addition, in order to raise the level of response to infectious diseases in the field of welfare service for persons with disabilities, the ministry formulated and disseminated a manual on infection control and business continuity guidelines.

#### (2) Employment for persons with disabilities

In order to prevent the infection from spreading, Hello Work informed that the application for seeking a job and to fill a job vacancy can be made without coming to the office as much as possible and job-hunting is available by such means as telephone counseling, by mail and online For continuous support at Local Vocational Rehabilitation Centers for Persons with Disabilities, and Employment and Life Support Center for Persons with Disabilities, measures

like putting efforts on the continuous support without coming to the office as much as possible is promoted.

Regarding employment settlement support for persons with disabilities (subsidies for assistance to persons with disabilities and subsidies for persons who assist persons with disabilities in adapting to workplaces), instead of the original face-to-face support, online support using ICT, etc. has become available.

In order to support employers' efforts to maintain employment, special measures have been taken to ease the requirements for granting employment adjustment subsidies and to expand the content of the subsidies, and special measures have been taken for trial employment subsidies (trial course for persons with disabilities and short-time trial course for persons with disabilities).

In addition, special consideration for stabilizing the employment for persons with disabilities is referred to the trade associations.

### (3) Education

With regard to the response to COVID-19 at each educational institution, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MEXT) has been disseminating information on measures against COVID-19 to students and parents from the beginning when infected persons began to be confirmed in Japan and is meticulous in ensuring safety. Various measures were taken, such as requesting the boards of education to pay attention to the matter of security.

#### A. Primary and secondary education

On February 27, 2020, the Prime Minister announced a policy of requesting simultaneous temporary closures of elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools, as well as special needs schools, from the perspective of prioritizing the health and safety of children and preparing for the risk of COVID-19 caused by the daily gathering of many students and teachers for a long period of time. In response to this, on February 28, the MEXT requested the school administrators to implement temporary closures until the start of the spring vacation, and many schools took measures for temporary closures.

Since some children with disabilities attending special needs schools, etc. could not stay alone when parents could not take leaves during this temporary closing period, requests were made to ensure places for these children in the local disability welfare services.

In addition, in order to ensure the learning of children who are unable to attend school due to the temporary closure, the basic concept of home learning to be imposed by schools was set forth in the "Notice on the Educational Guidance for Children who are Unable to Attend School due to the Temporary Closure for Countermeasures against the Novel Coronavirus Infections"

on April 10, 2020. In addition, on May 7, the ministry issued a notice entitled “Notice on the Support for Home Learning of Students with Disabilities During the Temporary Closure for Countermeasures against the Novel Coronavirus Infections,” in which it notified points to be noted regarding home learning for each type of disability in order to support home learning of students with disabilities. In addition, it requested each school to actively provide support for home learning.

Although the state of emergency declaration was lifted in stages, on June 19, the MEXT summarized and disseminated its basic concept for pupils/students with disabilities, which had been presented in guidelines and other documents, as “Concepts and Approaches for Measures against Novel Coronavirus Infection in Special-Needs Schools.”

#### B. Higher education

At the higher education level, in order to both prevent the spread of COVID-19 and secure learning opportunities for students, the “Guidelines for Responding to the New Coronavirus Infections at Universities” was compiled on June 5, 2020 and disseminated to each university, etc. In addition, in order to continue learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, support was provided for the development of an environment for distance education at universities, etc., and consideration was given to students with disabilities in the “Q&A on the Coordination of Academic Schedules and the Use of Distance Learning” on May 22, 2020.

#### C. Social education

The MEXT has been urging social education facilities such as community centers and libraries to be accessible to all people, regardless of disabilities. In response to the spread of COVID-19, local governments are urged to take thorough infection prevention measures by disseminating the infection control guidelines formulated by nationwide organizations such as community centers and libraries in May 2020, and to ensure that local residents, including those with disabilities, have opportunities to learn even when COVID-19 spreads.

### (4) Sports, culture and arts

#### A. Sports

In addition to the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games due to the spread of COVID-19, the 7th Special Olympics Japan Winter National Games in Hokkaido and the 54th National Athletic Meet for the Deaf in 2020 have been cancelled, and the National Sports Festival for People with Disabilities has been postponed to 2023.

In light of this situation, the Japanese Para-Sports Association has formulated the “Guidelines for Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 for the Resumption of Sports Events,” which outlines

the criteria for resuming various sports events and points to keep in mind to prevent the spread of infectious diseases during the resumed events.

#### B. Culture and arts

In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, many cultural and artistic events, including those related to the arts for persons with disabilities, were cancelled or changed, which caused significant impact on cultural and artistic activities.

For this reason, in addition to the efforts to maintain employment by the Government as a whole, it has also been trying to continue cultural projects and maintain employment by all means possible, such as subsidies for sustaining businesses, subsidies for employment adjustment, special tax exemptions for donations of ticket prices for cancelled cultural and artistic events, and deferment of taxes and social insurance premiums.

In addition, the Agency for Cultural Affairs, utilizing the first, second and third supplementary budgets for FY 2020, has been working for the resumption, continuation and development of cultural and artistic activities through measures against infectious diseases in cultural facilities, efforts to continue the activities of cultural and artistic organizations and to strengthen their profitability, and proactive support for performances with sufficient measures against infectious diseases.