

Issue 16

Current situation and countermeasures against the novel coronavirus infection (COVID-19)

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Hello.

This is Kohno Shigeru from Nagasaki University.

Novel coronavirus infections are raging across the world.

Posed on us are important questions when we address the issue of Planetary Health: How has this virus emerged? How should we respond to the infection?

Below is a summary of a conversation with Prof. Izumikawa, the Director of the Nagasaki University Hospital Infection Control and Education Center. Please note the data are from the time of the conversation.

The first novel coronavirus infection was confirmed in China in December 2019. After the outbreak in China occurred, it has spread rapidly worldwide since February. Now cases of COVID-19 have been reported in 88 countries outside of China.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) report, the number of people infected as of March 6 was 98,192 worldwide: 80,711 in China, 17,481 outside China, and 349 in Japan (excluding passengers from the Diamond Princess cruise ship).

Among the countries outside of China, South Korea has the highest number of infected people, 6,284, followed by 3,858 in Italy, and 3,513 in Iran. Confirmed infections are increasing in Germany and France by several hundreds. The expected number of additional cases caused by one infected person (basic reproduction number) was calculated to be 2.0 to 2.5. The infection will likely continue to spread widely for some time.

In Japan, an average of 20 additional cases have been reported every day. It's possible that this rate may increase.

The number of deaths is 3,045 in China (a 3.8% case fatality rate) and 335 outside China (1.9%). In Japan the number of deaths is 6 (1.7%), excluding the Diamond Princess cruise ship. While the case fatality rate for influenza is usually less than 0.1%, the novel coronavirus has a higher rate compared to influenza.

Elderly people and those with chronic illnesses have a much higher case fatality rate. Nagasaki University must take the initiative to reduce this rate in society as much as possible.

I think you are spending every day worried about you and your family being infected by the novel coronavirus.

Without letting fear take over us, we need to understand how the infection is transmitted and take appropriate action. This virus spreads by droplets and by physical contact. When you are not feeling well, wear a mask to prevent droplets from spreading. If you are not wearing a mask, make sure to cover your mouth with your bent elbow when you cough (good respiratory hygiene). Contact infection happens when the virus is picked up by your hands and it enters your body through your mouth. Keep in mind that you should wash your hands and use hand disinfectant regularly, for example, when you change activities and locations.

Novel coronavirus symptoms are like the common cold. If you have mild cold symptoms, it's important not to go to crowded places.

Nagasaki University staff should take their temperature daily before they go to work, and if your temperature is 37.5 °C or higher, please stay home. If the fever continues for more than four days, staff who work outside of the university hospital should contact the Center for Health and Community Medicine. Staff who work at the hospital should contact the Nagasaki University Hospital Infection Control and Education Center.

In the next issue, I will introduce the activities that Nagasaki University has conducted against coronavirus infections.