

July 12, 2022

To the people of Ehime,

Raising the Alert Level to a Special Alert Period for the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Since late June, COVID-19 has spread rapidly in various settings within various age groups in Ehime, including at schools, child/senior care facilities, workplaces, meal gatherings, and sporting events. Moreover, there have been many cases of individuals disregarding the preventive measures and dining restrictions necessary for resuming socioeconomic activities. Meanwhile, the daily number of cases has exceeded that of the same day the previous week for the 24th consecutive day, and just today, the number of reported cases has exceeded 1,000, thus marking the beginning of an unprecedented seventh wave.

In addition, there has even been a confirmed case of the Omicron subvariant BA.5 in the prefecture. The BA.5 strain is 1.2 times more contagious than the currently dominant BA.2, and four times more likely to evade the immune system's defenses. There is a strong concern that the BA.5 strain will rapidly replace the BA.2 strain as people visit to their hometowns or travel for events and summer vacations, leading to the further spread of infection.

Furthermore, as of today, the occupancy rate of hospital beds for COVID-19 patients in Ehime is at 36%, and the medical burden on healthcare providers has greatly increased. We have promptly begun coordinating with each institution on an emergency measure to increase the number of beds from the current 307 to a maximum of 360.

In response to this situation, the alert level will be raised to a "Special Alert Period," effective immediately.

We cannot yet consider this rise in cases to yet be the peak given the situation in other prefectures where the wave had already begun. Until now, Ehime has been able to balance resuming socioeconomic activities and preventive measures, but we are currently on the verge of being forced to prioritize strengthening measures and diverge from this "new normal."

If the infection continues to spread and the medical burden increases to the point where it directly impacts the lives of residents, we will have no choice but to transition to an "Infection Control Period" and begin enforcing stricter measures, including the cancellation of events such as night markets, summer festivals, and fireworks shows. It is extremely important that each and every one of us reanalyze our actions, place a stronger emphasis on avoiding infection, and continue to practice preventive measures.

At this time, we ask everyone to take the following preventive measures:

Events

- Participants are required to thoroughly practice preventive measures when attending events.
 - Avoid talking or eating without a mask.
 - Be especially careful before and after events during activities such as meal gatherings and karaoke sessions.

Dining Out

- Follow dining rules and regulations. Be especially careful at gatherings that involve alcohol consumption.
- After attending a meal gathering, be careful of transmitting anything to those around you. (Check your physical condition before and after dining out, and make use of free COVID-19 testing.)

Precautions for Older Adults

- Older adults and their family members who are at a higher risk of serious illness should refrain from activities with high risk of infection, such as going to crowded places.
- Restrictions on visits to older adults in senior care facilities will be strengthened.

Precautions for Everyone

In response to the increase in cases and close contact infections,

- Everyone should secure about 3 days' worth of food and water in addition to preparations made in case of a disaster.

Finally, those who are eligible are urged to make an appointment for the vaccine before the summer holidays in order to reduce the spread and prevent serious illness.

Tokihiro NAKAMURA
Governor of Ehime Prefecture