

Situation report – COVID19; Japan, Tuesday 5th of May 2020

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Caseload in Japan



Green – symptomatic cases
Yellow – asymptomatic
Grey – symptomatic status uncertain/unreported



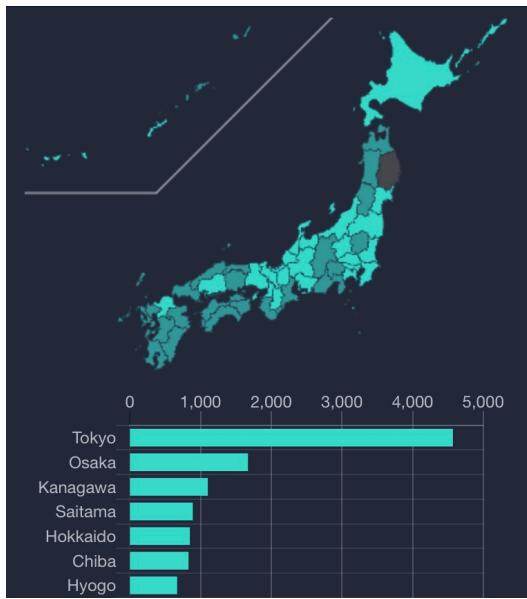
Orange – confirmed
Grey suspected/final confirmation pending



Nationwide the reduction in new diagnoses following the peak seen on the 12th of April (712 cases) appears to be sustained. However, the state of emergency has been extended to May 31st with an announcement by prime minister Abe that he hopes to see a reduction to below 100 cases per day, which would represent a further 50% fall in cases as compared to the past week.

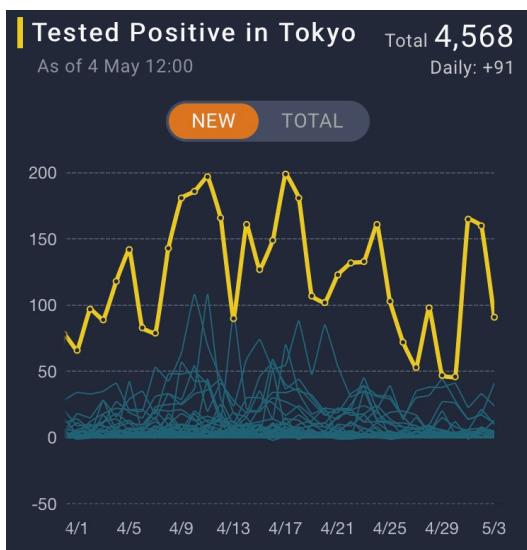
This observed stabilization extends to the number of recorded deaths due to COVID19 which have been reported at a rate of 13 to 34 per day over the past week.

As reported previously, the number of patients with more severe symptoms (those requiring intensive care support) remains well within the capacity to provide care.



Caseload in Tokyo

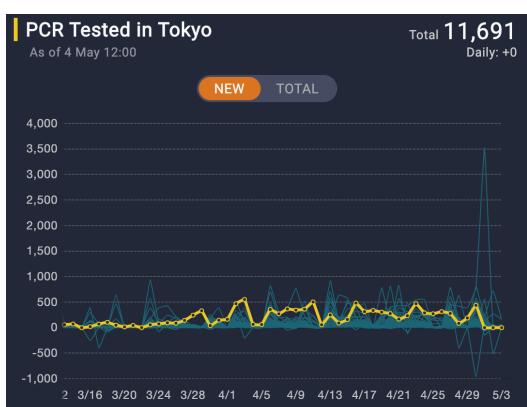
Tokyo saw a sharp increase in the number of new diagnoses on the 1st and 2nd of May (165 and 160 new cases respectively). This is still marginally below the daily totals seen in mid-April (peak of 199 cases on the 17th of April) – see graph. It is too soon to determine whether this represents a new upswing in infections or even the early stages of a second peak. However, on reviewing the trend for daily cases in Tokyo it is hard to see the clear and sustained decrease which would be required in order to begin to relax social distancing measures and re-open businesses.



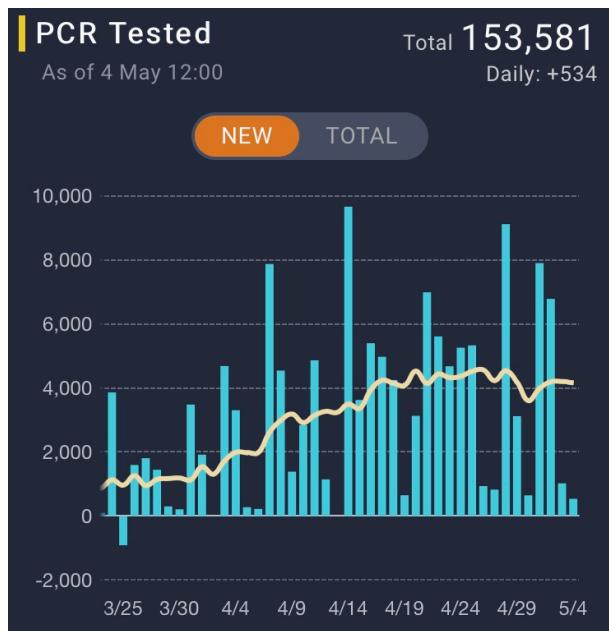
It is highly probable that relaxation of social distancing will be carried out at a regional level. Based on current trends, measures are likely to remain in place in Tokyo for longer than in many other parts of the country.

A further consideration affecting reported case numbers is testing capacity. As more widespread testing is eventually rolled out, there is a chance that this will result in an apparent increase in infections as fewer mild or minimally symptomatic cases go undetected. However, at the moment, numbers of patients tested in Tokyo remain relatively low despite plans to expand the numbers of testing sites and to introduce drive-through testing facilities.

(the lack of tests for the past three days on the graph to the left reflects delays in data reporting over the holiday period).



Testing for COVID19 in Japan



Access to testing and the overall rate of PCR tests performed in Japan remain lamentably low by international standards. To date Japan has carried out approximately 1.5 tests per 1,000 population. Most European countries are currently testing between 10 and 20 times as many people on per capita basis and Japan lags behind many countries in South and Central America.

There does not appear to have been a significant increase in the testing rate over the past month (see graph).

Encouragingly, there is now clear acknowledgement that the situation requires corrective action with prime minister Abe's statement yesterday that the level of testing in Japan has been inadequate. Lack of trained lab personnel is the most frequently cited reason for the delay in expanding testing. However, there is still no stated goal stated in terms of daily test capacity and access to testing remains problematic, with some studies showing that of people who approach medical services with concerns over symptoms of infection, fewer than 10% are actually tested for COVID19.

Antibody tests

Some studies looking at the number of people with antibodies to COVID19 have been released prior to publication and subsequently reported in the media. Most notably, researchers in Kobe tested samples from 1,000 patients who visited an out-patient clinic between the 31st of March and the 7th of April for reasons other than respiratory infection. 33 of the samples tested positive for antibodies deemed to have resulted from a COVID19 infection. This was extrapolated this to suggest that 2.7% of the general population could have been infected (approximately 50,000 people), a much higher rate of infection than identified by PCR testing of people who were unwell. However, this study and others like it need to be interpreted with care. The accuracy of many commercially available antibody tests is still unknown and even a relatively low false positive rate across many samples could result in misleading data, so without a clear understanding of the reliability of the test used, the researcher's conclusions should be treated as speculative at best.

Hospital Care in Tokyo

Current national occupancy of hospital beds designated for COVID19 patients is 38.2% with hospital doctors in Tokyo reporting that many designated COVID19 wards are now more than half empty as patients with mild symptoms are being allowed to return home. While some hospital COVID19 wards have fewer vacant beds, across the metropolitan area there is sufficient capacity to provide high quality with no immediate prospect of any deterioration in the situation.

Exiting the State of Emergency

With the extension of the state of emergency to the 31st of May, announcements as to how social distancing will be relaxed are awaited. However, in Tokyo, limited reduction in infection rates for April suggest that even a modest increase in social contact would be quite likely to result in a further period of increasing rates of contagion. It is hard to see how resumption of normal use of public transport, re-opening of schools or increased use of high foot flow businesses such as restaurants and bars could be sustained without a second and perhaps more severe wave of infections.

References

Reported Caseload Graphs and data sourced from MHLW as reported by Toyo Keizai -
<https://toyokeizai.net/sp/visual/tko/covid19/en.html>

COVID19 Japan – anti coronavirus dashboard
<https://www.stopcovid19.jp/>

Estimation of seroprevalence of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) using preserved serum at an outpatient setting in Kobe, Japan: A cross-sectional study.
<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.26.20079822v1>

Resources

How to get help if you suspect that you have COVID19 (Tokyo residents)
<https://stopcovid19.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/flow>