

March 14, 2023

To Department Heads and
Department Heads within the Administrative Bureau

Executive Vice President (for Strategic Planning, Provost)
Executive Vice President (for Education and Student Support)
Executive Vice President
(for Human Resources, Personnel Administration, Environmental Security and Facilities)

Notification about how Tohoku University will respond to the change in the legal status of
COVID-19 under the Infectious Diseases Act

The Japanese government has decided that, as of May 8, COVID-19 will be downgraded and be classified as a ‘Category V’ infectious disease like seasonal influenza. This measure will remain in place unless extraordinary circumstances should arise, such as the emergence of a mutant strain that differs significantly in terms of its pathogenicity from the Omicron strain. In line with this reclassification, the government has reviewed policies and measures related to COVID-19 that have hitherto been in place. The approach to the wearing of masks will change as of March 13, and the approach to the wearing of masks at schools (including universities) will change as of April 1.

In line with these changes, Tohoku University will also make changes to its policies. Please inform all those within your department of these changes.

1. Changes at the university

(1). With respect to the wearing of masks

With respect to the wearing of masks from the start of the new semester (April 1), the following revisions will be made to the current policy of recommending the wearing of masks when carrying out educational and research activities.

- It is up to each individual to decide whether they should wear a mask. Each individual’s decision should be respected.
- No individual should be forced either to put on a mask or to take off a mask.
- However, if infections begin to spread in a significant way, it is possible that individuals may be asked to wear an appropriate mask for a given time depending on the situation.

- Wearing a mask is effective in helping to prevent the spread of infection to those who are at high risk of becoming seriously ill, such as the elderly. Therefore, wearing a mask is recommended in the following situations:
 - When visiting a medical institution
 - When visiting medical institutions and facilities for the elderly where they and others at high risk of becoming seriously ill are either hospitalized or resident.
 - When travelling on a crowded train or bus (*), such as during rush hours (for the time being)

* This excludes transit where most of those on board can be seated (e.g. shinkansen, commuter liners, highway buses, chartered buses, etc.).
- In addition, those who are at high risk of becoming seriously ill are recommended to wear a mask to protect themselves from becoming infected on occasions when they visit places with large crowds during periods in which the virus is more prevalent.
- What those who are symptomatic should do:
Those who are symptomatic (i.e., they have a fever, cough, shortness of breath, lethargy, etc.), those who have tested positive for COVID-19, and those who live with someone who has tested positive should refrain from going outside to help prevent the spread of infection. If any such individual has no choice but to go outside, such as to visit a hospital, they should avoid crowds and wear a mask.

(2). The Tohoku University Business Continuity Plan (BCP) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19

The BCP will be changed to Level 0 from April 1.

(3). How those who are symptomatic or who have tested positive should act

Those who have tested positive:

Until May 7, individuals who test positive for COVID-19 should follow administrative policies and the 'Flow Chart of Measures to Combat the New Coronavirus (for those in poor health)'.

With respect to how such individuals should act after May 8, the university will base its response on future government policy, and will inform those at the university at an appropriate time.

'Flow Chart of Measures to Combat the New Coronavirus (for those in poor health)'

Until May 7, according to the flow chart, those who are unwell should refrain from going to school or work and monitor their health at home. Those who become unwell after May 8 should take appropriate measures as they see fit. The university plans to make a separate announcement about the criteria for returning to the university.

'A guide on how people who are poorly will be dealt with' (in Japanese only)

This guide will not be applicable after April 1, but a revised Q&A will be shared in the future. It will include information such as guidelines on returning to work if an individual becomes unwell.

(4). Identification and management of close contacts

After April 1, per the revisions made to the policy of recommending the wearing of masks, the identification and management of close contacts will end. If an employee or student at the university is living with an individual who tests positive, and is thereby a close contact, they should follow the prescribed administrative measures as before. After May 8, such individuals should follow the administrative policy in effect at that time (to be announced in the future).

(5). Trends of infection (Reporting positive cases)

From April 1, the reporting of positive cases will also end in conjunction with the changes described in (4). However, with respect to extracurricular activities, student groups will be separately informed how to report any outbreaks of multiple cases of infection that arise among the group at the same time.

(6). Basic infection prevention measures

While revisions have been made to the policy of recommending the wearing of masks, basic infection control measures remain important. The university continues to recommend practicing ventilation, social distancing, frequent handwashing with soap, disinfectant, etc., as well as avoiding the three C's (closed spaces, crowded places, close contact).

2. Additional resource material (in Japanese only)

- Change in the legal status of COVID-19 under the Infectious Diseases Act
Decision by the Novel Coronavirus Response Headquarters on January 27, 2023
https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/novel_coronavirus/th_siryou/kihon_r2_050127.pdf
- Basic Policies for Novel Coronavirus Disease Control
As determined by the Novel Coronavirus Response Headquarters on November 19, 2021
(and revised on February 10, 2023)
https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/novel_coronavirus/th_siryou/kihon_r1_050210.pdf
- Reassessment of the policy of recommending the wearing of masks
Decision by the Novel Coronavirus Response Headquarters on February 10, 2023
https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/novel_coronavirus/th_siryou/kihon_r2_050210.pdf
- Notification regarding revisions to the Basic Policies for Novel Coronavirus Disease Control and the handling of masks at graduation ceremonies, etc.
Announced by MEXT on February 10, 2023
https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20230213-mxt_kouhou01-000004520_1.pdf

Attached documents

- Revisions to government policy related to COVID-19 under the Infectious Diseases Act
- Revised 'Flow Chart of Measures to Combat the New Coronavirus (for those in poor health)'
 - ※ Applicable from April 1 to May 7. Information regarding measures taken from May 8 will be shared at a later date.
- Q&A regarding masks, reporting a positive test, close contacts, etc.

Contact Information

For inquiries related to the BCP:

General Affairs Division

General Affairs and Planning Department

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For inquiries related to COVID-19 prevention measures:

Health and Safety Management Section

Labor and Health Administration Division

E-mail: anzen@grp.tohoku.ac.jp

For inquiries related to specific sets of guidelines, etc.,

please ask the relevant department