

Issue 24

COVID-19 : Worldwide movement

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Hello. This is Kohno Shigeru, the President of Nagasaki University.

In the last issue I talked about the spread of COVID-19 by comparing it to grass and fire. In this issue I will talk about how the virus is affecting the world.

As COVID-19 moves like an unstoppable fire as it spreads across the globe, each country is taking a different approach and with different measures. As a result, there are different results. In Wuhan, China there was a strict lockdown where, to use the grass and fire metaphor, they covered the grass with a large steel plate and this was successful. In Japan it is difficult to enforce this kind of strict lockdown legally, so that policy cannot be implemented here.

South Korea and Germany are two examples of countries that have now successfully reduced the number of infected people and kept this number low. What kind of policies (fire reduction) do they have?

South Korea previously suffered from a large fire in the form of a viral infection. In 2015, the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) virus outbreak occurred there and they learned from that experience on how to extinguish COVID-19.

First, they invested in detection equipment to discover sparks. They introduced the capacity to run many PCR tests (polymerase chain reaction, a method for detecting the virus). Testing is widely available at drive-through and walk-through centers to quickly find and stop the sparks from developing into a fire.

South Korea also used another method to find the spread of fire. They gather data from sources such as credit card history, security camera footage, and mobile phones to track the last 14 days of movement of those who test positive. People with mild infections are required to stay in temporary treatment centers instead of hospitals, which prevents the hospital system from becoming overwhelmed.

The South Korean response does not prevent the movement of people with city lockdowns or other restrictions. Currently the country has entered the phase with a decreasing number of

infected people and the policy has been successful.

Germany has a different policy than South Korea that is also successful in reducing the spread of COVID-19.

To return to the metaphor of the grass and fire, German measures prevent the introduction of new unknown sources of fire. By enforcing restrictions on movement between countries, new fires are prevented. At the same time restrictions on public gathering and measures to support the economy were introduced. This may be because of the high awareness of risk control by the German people. These measures were implemented in a way that is easy for people to accept and so far these measures have been effective.

At present, the increase in the number of infected people has slowed down and if this trend continues, infection control will be successful. Still, more than 150,000 people are infected.

Japan is not the same as South Korea and Germany. In the case of Japan, we will have to deal with the situation in our own way and we have been coping with the sparks quite successfully.

However, infections have been gradually increasing. Now incoming visitors from other countries have almost stopped and the risk of fire coming from outside has been greatly reduced. It is necessary for us not to carry the sparks around in the country. The actions of each one of us is important.

Even in countries where infection control is successful, it takes 2-3 months for results to appear and the number of total cases is not insignificant. Let's be patient. Let's do our best.

In the next issue we return with projections for Japan and Nagasaki.