

## Ota International Exchange Centre Opening Commemoration Lecture

Health and Community Development Learnt Through Experiencing the COVID-19 Pandemic

～Knowledge about Infectious Diseases to Know in the Context of Internationalisation～

### Lecture Summary

Monday, May 23, 2022, 18:00 – 19:15

Ota International Exchange Centre

※Also streamed live online

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#### COVID-19

• 12/2019: An outbreak of pneumonia with an unknown cause in Wuhan, China, was reported to be caused by a novel coronavirus.

• To date, about 500 million people have been infected and 6.2 million people have died. The situation is still not likely to be brought under complete control.

#### ● Characteristics of the coronavirus:

• Spike glycoproteins bind to human cells leading to infection

• “Tiny droplets” (microdroplets) emitted during speech, eating and drinking can lead to infection (aerosol infection), therefore following the 3 Cs to avoid initial risks of infection, using non-woven masks and frequently ventilating areas is important.

#### ● Recent developments:

• Improved understanding of infection control measures and higher vaccination rates are thought to have prevented a sharp increase in the number of infections.

#### ● About airborne infection:

• Under some conditions, aerosol infections take the form of pseudo-airborne infections, so “protecting the space” (stressing the importance of ventilation) is important.

#### Infectious diseases from overseas to be careful about

• Particular attention should be paid to viruses (e.g. dengue fever), protozoa (e.g. malaria) and bacteria (e.g. typhoid fever, tuberculosis).

• There are countries and regions overseas where dengue fever, Ebola and zika virus infections are considered endemic.

• Where there is a small endemic or epidemic somewhere in the world, there is always a risk because it is unknown if or when it will become a major epidemic or even pandemic.

⇒ Knowing the pathogen, considering the routes of infection, and reacting calmly can effectively control the infection. In the case of the current pandemic, it is thought that society demonstrated infection control precisely during the Golden Week period.

#### Tuberculosis (TB)

• The number of foreign-born TB cases in Japan is increasing, particularly among the younger

generation.

- Ota City, being a city with many foreign residents, also needs support. Things such as further improvement of the health check-up system and general access to medical care.

#### Hopes for Ota through the Ota International Exchange Center

- Home to Haneda Airport = a need for caution towards infection diseases
- A strong infection control centre
- A city actively promoting the further revitalisation of international exchange
- A city with many foreign-born residents
- A city which is kind to foreigners



Being prepared for crisis management is crucial when implementing international exchange

= In other words, knowing about infectious diseases and taking appropriate infection control measures.

- It is important for Ota City residents to utilize the centre and promote international exchange together.

## Q&A

**Q: Were there any cultural differences around the world that you were able to notice due to the pandemic?**

A: For one, I realised how different “mask culture” is overseas. While there were some countries that implemented the compulsory wearing of masks, I thought it was good how the majority of people in Japan were able to cooperate and just wear masks without much of that. On the other hand, there were also some excessive actions by some, such as the “self-restraint police” who acted against those who did not cooperate in wearing masks. It made me realise both the strengths and weaknesses within Japan’s culture.

Recently, new recommendations regarding masks have been announced. With regard to that, I think perhaps it is time for each of us to understand COVID-19, use our imagination to avoid risks and take effective but less burdensome infection control measures, such as removing the mask when outdoors when there are no people around.

**Q: We often see in the media that there are many places overseas where masks are not worn. When I think about how more and more foreigners will soon be able to come to Japan, I honestly feel very anxious. What is your view regarding that?**

A: In Japan, there is common experience and culture, so it is easy to handle the situation. But as the number of foreigners permitted to enter Japan increases in the future, some of them may not be aware of Japanese practices for dealing with new coronavirus infections, so we will need to devise new methods to handle that. It will become important for the government to start actively spreading this kind of information, for example – at airports, so that people entering Japan are able easily understand Japanese culture and customs.

**Q: With Ota City being the “air gateway” to Japan, some may feel anxious about the possibility of new infectious diseases entering the city. How should we go about our lives while dealing with such new infectious diseases in the future?**

A: This is precisely the reason behind me holding this lecture. By knowing the pathogen, considering the routes of infection, and responding calmly, we will be able to effectively control the infection disease. I think that by regularly organising lectures and such like today, we can become a city that works together with its residents in the fight against infectious diseases. We want to cooperate as well.

**Q: Have any medications (silver bullet) for COVID-19 been developed around the world?**

A: Oral medications have been developed in order to prevent the infection getting progressively more severe. There are Japanese companies that are applying to develop drugs that are considered to be even more effective. When approved and made available to us in the near future, it could go from a category II infectious disease to a category V infectious disease\*<sup>1</sup>. If it becomes a category V infectious disease, the response towards it will be similar to that of influenza. So, once we get to that point, we will be able to see things starting to return to normal.

**Q: Are there any differences in infection control measures between Japan and other countries? (e.g. masks, hand washing, avoiding 3 Cs, alcohol disinfection)**

A: In other countries, when the number of infections and deaths is high, strict measures are taken to reduce the numbers at once, but once the effects are seen and the situation calms down, it seems that the measures are also loosened. I think the fact the number of infections almost always increases again after removing the measures suggests that measures should not be stopped so abruptly simply because the situation appears to have subsided. It is important to relax the measures in stages, being vigilant and monitoring the situation closely. In Japan, the relaxing of measures concerning mask wearing is being done in such a way. Authorities haven't suggested stopping mask wearing completely. Instead, they came to the decision that masks should be still worn in places where not wearing one could still be considered risky, but not necessary in places where the risk is considered to be low. This kind of approach is Japan's strategy.

\*1 : The classification is based on Act on the Prevention of Infectious Diseases and Medical Care for Patients with Infectious Diseases (the Infectious Diseases Control Law).