

Special Feature Disaster Management under COVID-19 crisis

COVID-19 infection has seen a widespread in some regions. The government has been taking measures to address this issue as an important crisis management issue, including the establishment of disaster management headquarters on March 26th, 2020. Under these circumstances, various parts of Japan in fiscal year (hereafter referred to as “FY”) of 2020 saw torrential rain, earthquakes, heavy snowfall, and other disasters. Particularly, disasters caused remarkable damage such as the Heavy Rain Event of July 2020, the heavy snowfall from December 2020 to January 2021, and the Earthquake Centered offshore of Fukushima Prefecture in February 2021. In the event of a natural disaster while under COVID-19 crisis, it is still necessary to continue to maintain and improve disaster prevention and other measures based around the infection status of COVID-19 to be able to provide necessary support and infection control measures to residents.

The "Special Feature" of the White Paper on Disaster Management in FY 2021 focuses on disaster management as its main theme under COVID-19 crisis, and outlines preparations for natural disasters under COVID-19 crisis, the damage caused by the major disasters that occurred in FY 2020, and responses by the government (Chapter 1). Adding to the foundation of Chapter 1, as a further expansion of disaster management, outlined are the "Act for Partial Amendment of the Basic Act on Disaster Management" and measures for evacuation behavior of residents (Chapter 2). Furthermore, the "Five-Year Acceleration Plan for Disaster Prevention, Disaster Mitigation, and Building National Resilience" will be outlined (Chapter 3).

Chapter 1 Disasters in FY 2020

Section 1 Disaster Management under COVID-19 crisis

1-1 Measures of Shelters based on the Infection Status of COVID-19

The government is working to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and as such, based on the "Basic Policies for Novel Coronavirus Disease Control" (decided by the Novel Coronavirus Response Headquarters on March 28, 2020), issued a series of notices since April 2020 and provided a variety of advice as follows to local governments on their efforts to take all possible measures against COVID-19 with related ministries and agencies : (1) disseminating of actions for dispersed evacuation, (2) promoting the establishment of as many shelters as possible by making use of hotels and inns, (3) disseminating information on how to respond to COVID-19 in shelters, and (4) sharing information on patients with COVID-19 in the event of a disaster.

(References:

<http://www.bousai.go.jp/taisaku/hinanjo/pdf/korona.pdf>

http://www.bousai.go.jp/taisaku/hinanjo/pdf/hinan_korona.pdf)

The government has established various guidelines* for shelters and has informed municipalities to take the necessary measures at shelters as part of the efforts to combat infectious diseases in shelters.

* Guidelines for Ensuring Satisfactory Living Conditions at Shelters (Cabinet Office)

(Reference: <http://www.bousai.go.jp/taisaku/hinanjo/pdf/1605kankyokakuho.pdf>)

Shelter Management Guidelines (Cabinet Office)

(Reference: http://www.bousai.go.jp/taisaku/hinanjo/pdf/1605hinanjo_guideline.pdf)

Guidelines for Health Management of People Living in Evacuation Shelters (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare)

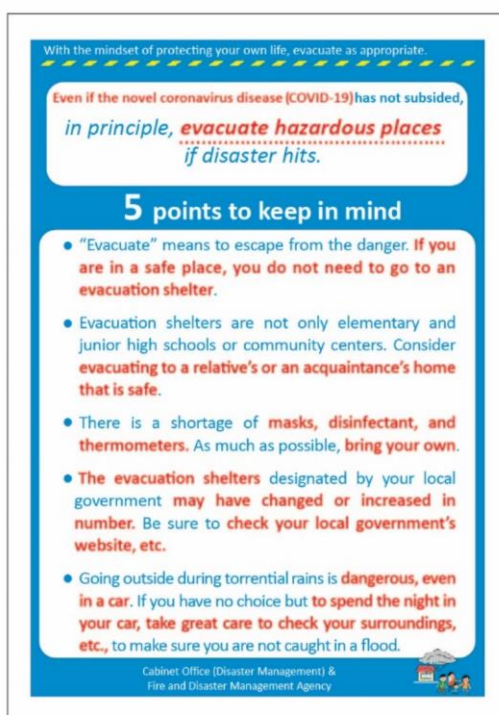
(Reference: <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121878.html>)

(1) Disseminating of Actions for Dispersed Evacuation

Even without complete control over the spread of COVID-19, those who are in places with increasing risk of disaster should evacuate to safer places, including shelters. From the perspective of contributing to the avoidance of the "three Cs", local governments were asked to distribute or circulate fliers to each household for residents to recognize the following: 1. "evacuation" is "to avoid dangerous places," which means those who are in safe places do not need to evacuate, 2. evacuation destinations should include not only evacuation sites/shelters, but also the homes of people in safe places, such as those of relatives and acquaintances.

(Reference: http://www.bousai.go.jp/kokusai/evacuation_points/pdf/point_en.pdf)

Evacuation During Disasters while COVID-19 is Not Under Control



Source: Cabinet Office data

(2) Promoting the Establishment of as Many Shelters as Possible by Making Use of Hotels and Inns

Depending on the disaster and the situation of the affected, it is important to open as many shelters as possible in addition to previously designated shelters, taking into consideration the capacity of each shelter. For this reason,

we have notified local governments to promptly consider the use of not only their own public facilities, but also hotels, inns, and training facilities provided by the government and other organizations.

1. Making Use of Hotels and Inns

In the event of a disaster, there is possibility of a need to immediately open hotels or inns as shelters. It is important for prefectures to support the smooth operation of shelters in each municipality by understanding the needs of shelters in each municipality, and leading hotels and inns to requesting and confirming the needs by cooperating with lodging organizations, if necessary. In this case, it is necessary for prefectures at departments in charge of disaster prevention and health and welfare departments to cooperate and coordinate well in light of the infection status of COVID-19. The Cabinet Office, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare have taken such initiatives and issued notices for local governments to promptly consider the use of hotels and inns, urging them to take actions.

In addition, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and the Japan Tourism Agency supported the efforts of local governments, asking prefectural accommodation organizations for cooperation to prepare in advance lists of available hotels and inns and rent them out in case local governments need.

(References:

http://www.bousai.go.jp/taisaku/hinanjo/pdf/corona_hotel_0429.pdf

http://www.bousai.go.jp/taisaku/hinanjo/pdf/428_taiou.pdf)

2. Utilization of Training Facilities Owned by Ministries and Independent Administrative Agencies

The Cabinet Office and the Fire and Disaster Management Agency requested ministries and agencies to cooperate with renting out training centers, lodging facilities, and other facilities they own as shelters. At the same time, they requested to make lists of available facilities whose jurisdiction were ministries and agencies.

Those lists which were prepared by each ministry and agency were provided by the Cabinet Office through prefectures to the main departments of municipalities in charge of disaster prevention.

(Reference: <http://www.bousai.go.jp/taisaku/hinanjo/pdf/syukuhaku.pdf>)

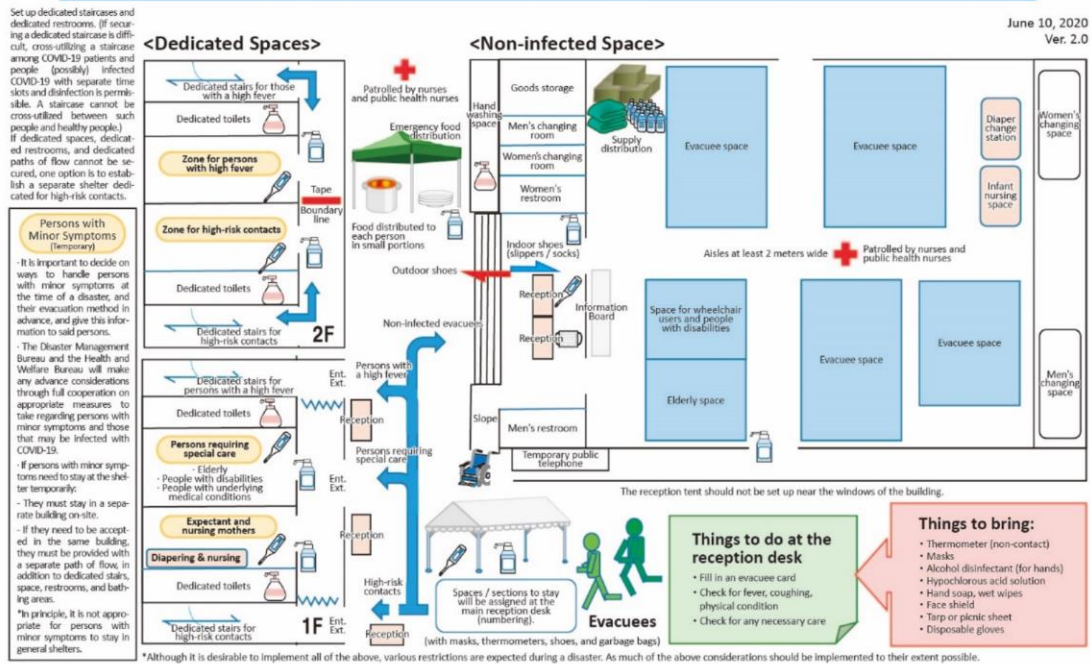
(3) Disseminating Information on Responses to COVID-19 in Shelters

1. Layout of Shelters and Ways to Use Space

The government supported the response in the field by creating reference examples such as layouts of shelters in dealing with COVID-19, space layouts for healthy people to stay in shelters using partitions and tents, and private room layouts for those with symptoms such as fever and coughing and others in close contact, and disseminated these references to local governments.

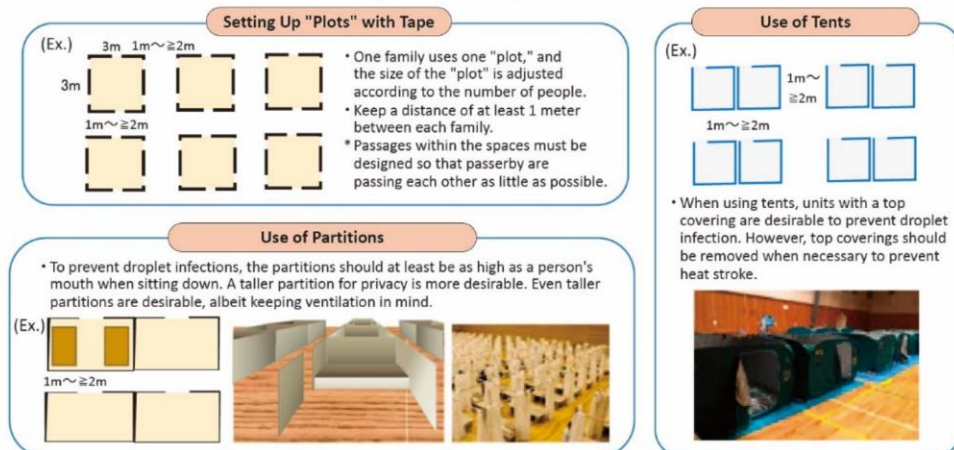
(Reference: http://www.bousai.go.jp/pdf/0610_corona.pdf)

Shelter Layout for COVID-19 (Example) <Evacuee Reception>



Shelter Accommodation Space for Healthy People (Example)

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- In a large space such as a gymnasium, the following methods can be used to provide a space for healthy people to stay. For infection control and privacy protection, partitions or tents should be used.
 - If elderly people, people with underlying medical conditions, people with disabilities, or expectant and nursing mothers who are at high risk of infection need to stay in the shelter, it is desirable to set up dedicated rooms in the shelter, but it is also possible to create dedicated zones separated by partitions in the gymnasium and use it in the same way as described below.



- * People should be kept 2 meters (at least 1 meter) apart at all times.
- * People should keep their mask on at the shelter at all times. In particular, people must wear a mask when entering a zone where there is only 1 meter in between people.
- * Although it is desirable to implement all of the above, various restrictions are expected during a disaster. As much of the above considerations should be implemented to their extent possible.

Source: Cabinet Office data

2. Notes Concerning Health Management of Evacuees and Hygiene Management of Shelters

As reference for the establishment and operation of shelters in local governments, the government created a collection of Q & As, key points, and online videos, notified local governments under the joint names of the relevant ministries and agencies, and requested them to make preparation in advance as follows: consider shelters for

people to receive treatment at home, prepare for evacuee healthcare, consider private shelters for those in close contact, examine the use of space for hygiene management in shelters, ensure sanitary conditions in shelters, provide adequate ventilation and space, and so on.

(References:

http://www.bousai.go.jp/pdf/corona_QA2.pdf

http://www.bousai.go.jp/pdf/covid19_tsuuchi.pdf

<http://www.bousai.go.jp/coronam.html>)

3. Emergency Stores of Relief Supplies

As a response to COVID-19 in shelters before disasters occur, the Cabinet Office and the Fire and Disaster Management Agency have informed local governments that they could make use of a temporary grant for local development in response to COVID-19 for the costs of emergency stores of relief supplies such as masks, antiseptic solutions, cardboard beds and partitions, in order to proceed with creating an emergency store of relief supplies.

(4) Sharing Information on Patients with COVID-19 in the Event of a Disaster

From the perspective of appropriate response at the time of disaster, because it is considered worthwhile to share information on COVID-19 managed by prefectures, cities with public health centers and the health and welfare departments in special zones with the disaster prevention departments of prefectures and municipalities in a timely and appropriate manner, the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and others informed local governments of the points to keep in mind when sharing information during ordinary times, when there is a possibility of a disaster coming due to an approaching tropical cyclone and the like.

(Reference: http://www.bousai.go.jp/pdf/corona_0708.pdf)

1-2 Securing Relief Supplies based on the Infection Status of COVID-19

In the event of a large-scale disaster, it is fundamental for local governments to stockpile necessary supplies for shelters. On the other hand, not all the local governments have sufficient stores of relief supplies such as partitions and hygiene products necessary to prevent COVID-19 due to difficult logistics by the start of the flood season in 2020.

Therefore, the Cabinet Office worked with the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and other related organizations to support local governments in securing relief supplies for infectious diseases and provided technical advice that stocks of masks and other items could be exchanged between sanitary or civilian departments and disaster management departments of local governments. Also, the Cabinet Office made efforts to assist local governments in quickly securing relief supplies by providing information on mask vendors whose jurisdiction fell under the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and supported the purchasing of ethanol for hand sanitizing with the use of the priority supply scheme, which was unprecedented as a cross-ministerial measure.

Then, the Cabinet Office prepared for pushed-mode support in early stages with stockpiling sanitary supplies

(masks, disinfectant, etc.) necessary to combat COVID-19 and other anti-infection supplies such as partitions, in addition to cardboard beds that had been stored in the Cabinet Office. This was because early support was thought to be necessary from the perspective of improving the living environment in shelters, however, it was thought that manufacturing could take some time to catch up with sudden demand.

(References: http://www.bousai.go.jp/pdf/0612_mask.pdf

http://www.bousai.go.jp/pdf/20200617_corona_ethanol.pdf

http://www.bousai.go.jp/pdf/0619_corona_mask_ethanol.pdf)

1-3 Other Methods of Response

(1) Issuance of Disaster Affected Certificates

The Cabinet Office compiled measures to prevent infections and disseminated them to local governments nationwide because there was a concern due to COVID-19 that the three Cs (closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings) might occur when surveying damaged houses and issuing disaster affected certificates.

(Reference: http://www.bousai.go.jp/taisaku/pdf/colona_risai.pdf)

(2) Dispatch of National Staff for Support

Under the circumstances of the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, dispatch of national staff for support was implemented on a basis that those staff members had been in good health for a long time and that there had been no persons in close contact with said staff members who had been in poor health, paying attention to infection prevention measures such as wearing masks, disinfecting their hands, and disinfecting any shared items.

During the Heavy Rain Event of July 2020, based on a request from Kumamoto Prefecture, each provincial office disseminated items on checklists for hygiene which was prepared by prefectures to all thoroughly before dispatching national staff. After arriving at their destinations, physical condition management including checking daily temperature and subjective symptoms such as abnormal taste was thoroughly investigated. In addition, it was made known among the relevant ministries and agencies that the health status of such staff should be reported to the person in charge of each local department.

Also, regarding the dispatch of supporting staff from local governments, because it is important to take all possible measures to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and in order to promptly dispatch support to the affected areas, points to be noted in response were notified such as only dispatching staff after checking their health condition and thoroughly managing the health of dispatched staff during their dispatch and after their return.

(Reference: https://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000689055.pdf)

(3) Disaster Volunteers

Volunteers often play an important role in the recovery and reconstruction of affected areas and in reconstructing the lives of the affected. For example, in the event of a disaster, volunteers from inside and outside the affected area will rush to the affected area to carry out various support activities for the affected. However,

under COVID-19 crisis, it is necessary to consider prevention of further infection at places where volunteers perform support activities in affected areas. Therefore, the Japan Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, which coordinates volunteer activities (hereinafter referred to as "JVOAD"), and Japan National Council of Social Welfare indicated matters to be kept in mind regarding volunteer activities under COVID-19 crisis. In response to this, the Cabinet Office notified local governments of further collaboration between the government, Social Welfare Councils and NPOs, and urged local governments to take action so that support activities for those affected by disasters are carried out effectively even under conditions where there are restrictions on the number of active personnel, such as limiting the acceptance of volunteers to affected areas and neighboring areas due to COVID-19. (Reference: <http://www.bousai.go.jp/pdf/tsuchi/volunteer/partnership.pdf>)

1. "Guidelines for Disaster Response by Volunteers, NPOs, and Others in Situations of Concern for Infection with COVID-19" (By JVOAD)

The following three items are the basic policies for disaster response, and other points that differ from traditional disaster response, the nature of the activities of NPOs and other support organizations, and what should be prepared and confirmed in providing support in the field.

(1)	Support should be considered on the premise that local intentions should be taken into account.
(2)	Support should be provided mainly within the affected area, and in principle, external support should be provided mainly through remote response.
(3)	When requested by the local Disaster Management Headquarters or the government, supporters who have the necessary know-how for support may work in the affected area.

2. "Establishment and Operation of Disaster Volunteer Centers in Situations of Concern about COVID-19: The Approach of Japan National Council of Social Welfare VCs" (By INCSW)

The following points are provided for the establishment and operation of disaster volunteer centers (hereinafter referred to as "Disaster VCs" in this section) under COVID-19 crisis.

(1)	<p>[Establishment and Operation of Disaster VCs]</p> <p>The decision to establish a Disaster VC should be made based on the needs of the affected people, based on the opinions of experts, and after consultation with the local government. In order to make a quick decision on the establishment of a Disaster VC, necessary information should be discussed with the concerning local governments and decided before disaster strikes.</p>
(2)	<p>[Basic Approach to Recruiting and Accepting Volunteers]</p> <p>The expansion of the scope of volunteer recruitment should be determined through consultation with the local government (prefectural and municipal governments), based on the needs, opinions, and intentions of the residents of the affected areas, in accordance with the local government's basic response policy.</p>
(3)	<p>[Operating with Preventing Spread of Infection in Mind]</p> <p>When performing disaster volunteer activities, thorough measures must be taken to prevent the spread of infection. A pre-registration system should be devised to avoid crowded conditions caused by unspecified large numbers of visitors to Disaster VCs.</p>