

Statement from the Executive Board of Science Council of Japan
A Request on Measures Against Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) , and
Future Activities of Science Council of Japan

March 6, 2020

We express our deepest respect for all people in Japan and the rest of the world who are exerting their utmost efforts to combat and respond to COVID-19. In addition, we express our sincere solidarity with the people of the academic community around the world who are committed to controlling the new infectious disease or providing advice and information from their professional standpoints.

The fatality rate of COVID-19 (percentage of deaths due to disease aggravation among the infected cases) is lower than that of SARS (about 10%) and MERS (about 35%), which are also coronavirus diseases, but it is higher than that of seasonal influenza (0.1% or less). Moreover, once the infection spreads, the number of seriously ill patients increases, and fatalities increase because treatment measures are basically limited to symptomatic therapies due to the lack of confirmed antiviral drugs.

The Expert Meeting on the Novel Coronavirus Disease Control of the Japanese government, which was held on February 24th, made the following points regarding the current outbreak: “If the infection expands rapidly, it can cause an explosive increase in patients, elevate the risk of transmission to healthcare professionals, and collapse the medical system. As a consequence, the disruption of social and economic activities may worsen”. In addition, the meeting pointed out that “the biggest goal of measures which we must take is to thwart the speed of infection spread and reduce the incidence of the severely ill and casualties as much as possible”.

We would like to ask all the people to cooperate with the request from the government and municipalities regarding measures against COVID-19. Your cooperation will eventually reduce the speed of infection.

We acknowledge the government’s efforts to grasp the infection situation, to prevent the spread of infection, and to provide medical care and border measures.

As the impact on people's lives expands, the central and local governments need to take the impact of COVID-19 on our society seriously, and they should provide appropriate information to the people, businesses, and communities. To utilize the experience of COVID-19 disease in the future, we believe that the decision-making process and the implementation of countermeasures should be recorded and should be contributed to the promotion of evidence-based policy planning.

COVID-19 infections are not a domestic issue, but should be treated by international alliance. Science Council of Japan, a Japanese academic representative organization, is going to enhance cooperation with the International Science Council and Science Council of Asia, will promote information sharing with the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST) and National Academy of Sciences (NAS), and will also promote international efforts for disease prevention and control. At the same time, we will collect information on infectious disease countermeasures in Asian and African countries and consider the necessary support.

Science Council of Japan has been examining and responding to anticipated situations in prevention and control of large-scale infectious diseases. From now on, it is necessary to prepare guidelines to prevent and stop epidemics, to provide frameworks of public-private cooperation to develop vaccines and therapeutics, and to establish a medical system to secure beds for infectious disease patients in emergencies in the field of prevention and medication. We must also adapt our social and economic structures to counter the impact of a widespread epidemic.

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a federal government agency, conducts on-site investigations both domestically and internationally in the case of an epidemic that poses a threat to the health and welfare of the public, and conducts planning and implementing measures and giving advice to the governments.

Science Council of Japan has set up a new committee for a national-program proposal to prevent and control large-scale infectious diseases in the Second Section (Life Sciences), and has begun consideration through the collection of scientific data and information on the disease both domestically and internationally, including the response to this COVID-19.

We comprehensively examine government responses (including offering appropriate information to the public and its impact on economic society) and cooperation among the academic community, industry, and government. Based on these results, we will consider the systems required for prevention and control of large-scale infectious diseases, referring to current and past activities in the United States, and will formulate and publish statements. We will also make statements on the involvement of experts in the government's decision-making process, and on the records and preservation that form the basis for future consideration.

Humanity has been repeatedly attacked by infectious diseases and has overcome them every time. We will continue to face various infectious diseases, including new influenza and drug-resistant infections. It is important to take this COVID-19 outbreak as an opportunity to step up the prevention and control of infectious diseases, and medical measures, and to acquire resilience within the government and within each and every citizen.

Science Council of Japan realizes its social mission from an academic standpoint, and will work on infection control measures in cooperation with people from various standpoints, while engaging in academic solidarity from a global perspective.

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The Executive Board of Science Council of Japan

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