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Japan records highest COVID-19 daily case number, a foreseeable disaster



People walk by posters to promote the Olympic Games planned to start in the summer of 2021, in Tokyo, Wednesday, June 16, 2021. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)

As the Tokyo Summer Olympics games proceed into their second week, COVID-19 cases are increasing at a much faster rate than predicted in this huge and densely populated city of over 38 million. On July 29, there were 3,854 new cases in Tokyo, the highest daily infection case count recorded there so far. Daily cases are expected to exceed 5,000 in less than two weeks.

Despite widespread opposition, the Japanese government refused to cancel the Olympics in the face of a global pandemic and the emerging highly-contagious Delta variant. At least \$15.4 billion was spent on the Olympics by Japan, \$4 billion in broadcast revenue is expected and billions more in advertising. The media and entertainment bosses, and the

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governments which back them, fully aware of the potential consequences, calculated these revenues to be worth the cost in human life and lifelong complications as hospitals overflow.

Norio Ohmagari, Director of Disease Control and Prevention Center of the National Center for Global Health and Medicine, told the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Tokyo is “heading into an explosive spread of infection that we have never encountered before.” Tokyo’s hospitals are unable to keep up with the rapid increase in patient numbers, forcing them to postpone admissions. As a result, an increasing number of patients are forced to quarantine at home, and a growing number are dying at home without any access to healthcare.

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike’s response to the exploding cases exemplified the ruling class’s irrationality and anti-science tendencies. When questioned about the potential effect of the Olympics on the rising number of cases, she stated “It is the opposite. The Olympics has effectively increased the number of people staying at home.”

Prime Minister Suga also denied the impact of the Olympics on cases, stating, “The Tokyo Olympics did not have any effect on the increasing case numbers.” When asked the reason for this, he claimed, “We are taking measures to prevent infection from foreigners and increased traffic.”

Contrary to these statements, Shigeru Omi, President of the Japan Community Health Care Organization, admitted that the Olympics is one of the major causes, saying, “It is the responsibility of the government and the Olympics Committee to do whatever they can to stop the spread.” Nevertheless, Prime Minister Suga continues to reject any possibility of cancelling the Games.

The government and corporate media are attempting to divert public outrage by blaming young people. The corporate media is developing a false narrative of irresponsible youth spreading the virus by emphasizing the high rate of COVID-19 infection among those in their 20s and 30s. Headlines such as “Young people head to bars at night in Shinjuku, showing little concern over 3,000 COVID-19 cases” are flooding news media, citing cherry-picked and often twisted interview quotes from young people.

However, the reality is that the Japanese government has consistently downplayed the dangers of COVID-19 since the outbreak began, never taking meaningful measures to contain the infection or enforcing a mandated lockdown of non-essential businesses. Additionally, infection was most prevalent among restaurant employees, according to data from the Okinawa prefecture, which experienced one of the worst outbreaks.

Infections are rapidly increasing not only in Tokyo but also in three prefectures surrounding Tokyo, Chiba, Saitama, and Kanagawa. On July 28, all three prefectures saw a record-breaking increase in case numbers. They are considering declaring a state of emergency.

Japan has experienced a number of health care crises throughout the pandemic. The surge in cases is straining hospitals in the Tokyo metropolitan area and the surrounding region, rapidly approaching their capacity. Yokohama Rosai Hospital, a public hospital in the Kanagawa prefecture officially designated to accept Olympics athletes, is located right next to the Olympics arena. The workers at the hospital told *Asahi Shimbun* about their devastating situation.

Dr. Hayakawa explained how the ER hotline rang continuously throughout the day. In addition to COVID-19 patients, the high temperature in the metropolitan area is causing an increase in cases of heat stroke and dehydration and therefore putting additional pressure on the hospitals. Dr. Nakamura, the head of the emergency department, reported to the same press that he had to decline to take in an elderly patient who had a stroke because there were no more beds available.

Meanwhile, cases among Olympics athletes and staff continue to increase. There are now 193 confirmed infection cases among Olympics-related personnel. Contrary to Olympics organizers and the Tokyo governments' repeated promise for a "safe and secure" Games, it was revealed that the International Olympic Committee is not following the proposed Covid-19 protocols.

The committee's guideline states that they will conduct PCR tests on every volunteer worker. However, a number of volunteer workers told TBS news that they have never received the test nor any information regarding COVID testing. A volunteer worker who drives the athletes expressed his concerns to TBS: "I haven't got tested, not even once.

They have not contacted me yet and no explanation was given to me.” A translation volunteer stated, “I still have not received a test. I feel uncomfortable volunteering.”

The opposition to the Games is continuing. Yesterday, demonstrators gathered in front of the Prime Minister’s office. Many held up signs, criticizing the lack of effective COVID-19 measures or any relief fund for those who fell into poverty and homelessness. One sign reads “The Olympics torch relay was started by the Nazis! Money to the people! Use for aiding COVID-19 hardships! The Olympics for the big corporations and the aristocrats is unnecessary!”

The ruling class is responding to the popular opposition by intimidation. On the night of the opening ceremony, a protester was arrested. Law enforcement officers were recorded on video, harassing the protesters on their way home from a demonstration at the Road Cycling course. The ruling class deployed 1,900 Self-Defence Force soldiers at the Road Cycling course and mobilized more than 8,500 for the duration of the Games.

The explosive increase in case numbers will inevitably trigger a destructive health care crisis in Tokyo. In view of this, there are mounting calls for protest in the coming days and many are voicing their anger towards the Olympics, which has brought together anger against the Japanese ruling class, its deadly handling of the pandemic, and social inequality in Japan.

The growing determination to fight back against the herd immunity policies in Japan, is an expression of the determination by the international working class to unite. The fight to stop the travesty of the Games and the health care emergency it has produced in Japan is inseparable from the fight against the capitalist system across the globe, an outdated economic system that prioritizes profit over human lives.

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