

Tokyo asks restaurants, bars to shut early as virus spikes

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Tokyo's governor called Thursday for restaurants, bars and karaoke parlours to shut earlier to help contain the coronavirus as the Japanese capital reported a record number of new infections.

"The current situation is more serious than before," said Yuriko Koike,

citing experts.

"There were several clusters in Tokyo... We have no time to waste," she said, adding the number of infections through group dining is increasing.

Japan has so far escaped the epidemic relatively lightly, with around 32,500 infections and just over 1,000 deaths since the first case was detected in January.

But the number of cases has been on the rise since the government lifted a state of emergency two months ago.

"Tokyo will have to declare a state of emergency if the situation gets worse," Koike said.

Businesses in the capital that serve alcohol and karaoke parlours will be asked to close at 10 pm, from August 3 until the end of the month, Koike said.

The city's government will offer subsidies of 200,000 yen (\$1,900) to medium and small-sized firms that cooperate, she added.

"It's not realistic to ask them to close entirely," she said.

Complying is voluntary, with no penalties for those who don't, and comes as the capital reported 367 coronavirus cases just a day after a record single-day nationwide figure of 1,264 new cases.

Despite the surge, the central government has said there is no need to reimpose non-compulsory but widely respected calls for people to stay at home and business to close their doors—as was seen under the state of emergency.

Many of the new patients are younger people, with the number of severe cases and deaths so far not spiking.

Government officials argue that the healthcare system is not yet facing the prospect of being overwhelmed.

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