

# Tokyo adopts tougher virus rules, starts vaccinating elders

April 12 2021, by Mari Yamaguchi

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An elderly man receives his first dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine at Hachioji City Hall in Tokyo Monday, April 12, 2021. Japan started its vaccination drive with medical workers and expanded Monday to older residents, with the first

shots being given in about 120 selected places around the country. (Kyodo News via AP)

Tokyo adopted tougher measures against the coronavirus Monday as it struggles to curb the rapid spread of a more contagious variant ahead of the Olympics in a country where less than 1% of people have been vaccinated.

Japan started its [vaccination drive](#) with medical workers and expanded Monday to [older residents](#), with the first shots being given in about 120 selected places around the country.

The tougher COVID-19 rules, just three weeks after a [state of emergency](#) ended in the capital, allow Tokyo's governor to mandate shorter opening hours for bars and restaurants, punish violators and compensate those who comply. The measures remain through May 11.

The status was also raised for Kyoto in western Japan and the southern island prefecture of Okinawa, where cases have surged in recent weeks. The near-emergency status there is to continue through May 5, the end of Japan's "Golden Week" holidays, to discourage traveling.

Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike has asked residents to avoid nonessential trips and practice social distancing. She asked bars and restaurants in many areas of the prefecture to close at 8 p.m.

An elder care home in downtown Tokyo was among the locations where vaccines were being administered Monday.

But Koike urged residents to buckle up and be cautious while vaccinations are in an early stage.



An elderly man receives his first dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine at Hachioji City Hall in Tokyo Monday, April 12, 2021. Japan started its vaccination drive with medical workers and expanded Monday to older residents, with the first shots being given in about 120 selected places around the country. (Kyodo News via AP)

"We are still unarmed as we fight against the resurgence of the infections," Koike said. "Please follow the guidelines."

Health officials also will patrol bars and restaurants to ensure [safety measures](#) are observed, and testing will be increased at elderly care facilities.



The alert status had been raised a week ago for parts of western prefectures of Osaka and Hyogo, as well as Miyagi in the north. Fifteen cities in the six prefectures, including downtown Tokyo, are now under elevated virus measures.

The non-binding emergency ended in the Tokyo area on March 21. Tokyo's return to the alert status Monday underscores the difficulty of balancing anti-virus measures and the economy. Suga's government has been criticized for being too slow in enacting anti-virus measures out of a reluctance to further damage the pandemic-hit economy.



An elderly woman receives her first dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine at a special nursing home in Nagasaki, southwestern, Japan, Monday, April 12, 2021. Japan started its vaccination drive with medical workers and expanded Monday to older residents, with the first shots being given in about 120 selected places

around the country. (Kyodo News via AP)

Japan has managed the pandemic better than the United States and many countries in Europe, but not so well compared to other Asian countries and vaccinations have largely lagged behind due to limited supplies of the Pfizer [vaccine](#), which is the only one approved in Japan which so far entirely relies on imports.

In Hachioji city in western Japan, a first group of elderly residents had their first shots Monday. But officials are expecting a slow start due to limited shipment at the beginning.

Japan's domestic vaccine development has lagged behind other nations, leaving it reliant on imports. So far, the Pfizer vaccine is the only one Japan has approved, with approval pending for shots by AstraZeneca and Moderna. Japan has confirmed orders in for 344 million doses of vaccines to be provided this year—enough for its entire population.



An elderly woman receives her first dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine at a special nursing home in Itami, Hyogo prefecture, western Japan, Monday, April 12, 2021. Japan started its vaccination drive with medical workers and expanded Monday to older residents, with the first shots being given in about 120 selected places around the country. (Kyodo News via AP)

Sourcing enough imported vaccines is a major concern due to supply shortages and export controls in Europe, where those vaccines come from. Cases of blood clots linked to AstraZeneca vaccine is also causing uncertainty.

Japanese minister in charge of vaccine, Taro Kono, has said supplies are expected to pick up in May and that Japan will have enough Pfizer vaccine to cover the 36 million elderly population by the end of June.



Kono told a Sunday talk show on NHK television that he has to negotiate with the European Union to ensure steady supplies for the ordinary public.

Local municipal leaders expressed worries over an unclear vaccination schedule and staffing of medical workers amid the resurgence of the infections. "We will face a shortage of medical workers who can help in vaccination program if the ongoing upsurge worsens."



An elderly woman receives her first dose of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic in Kitaaiki village, Nagano prefecture, central Japan, Monday, April 12, 2021. Japan started its vaccination drive with medical workers and expanded Monday to older residents, with the first shots being given in about 120 selected places around the country. (Yohei Nishimura/Kyodo News via AP)





People wearing face masks to protect against the spread of the coronavirus walk on an underpass in Tokyo, Monday, April 12, 2021. Japan started its vaccination drive with medical workers and expanded Monday to older residents, with the first shots being given in about 120 selected places around the country. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)

Just over 1 million people in Japan have received the first of two vaccine doses, and the surge in cases may cause further cancellations of Olympic-related events.

Inoculations started in mid-February for medical workers, and the campaign will focus on older people through late June. The rest of the population is likely to have to wait until about July, making it almost

impossible for Japan to reach so-called herd immunity before the Tokyo Olympics begin on July 23.

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