

Japan to lift virus emergency one month before Olympics

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Japan plans to lift Tokyo's virus emergency on June 20, a month before the Olympics, the government announced Thursday as reports said only 10,000 spectators would be allowed at Games events.

Tokyo and several other parts of the country have been under a [virus](#) emergency since April 25, with the measure forcing the early closure of bars and restaurants and banning them from selling alcohol.

It is due to expire on June 20, and the minister overseeing Japan's coronavirus response said the government would seek to move Tokyo and nine other regions to looser restrictions.

"We'd like to consult today (with [medical experts](#)) about placing 10 prefectures... under quasi-emergency measures," Yasutoshi Nishimura said at the start of a meeting with the advisers.

The looser restrictions would ask restaurants and bars to close at 8pm, but allow them to serve alcohol until 7pm, lifting the current ban on sales.

The virus emergency will not be lifted in Okinawa, which has requested it remains in place for several more weeks.

An official announcement on the move is expected later Thursday, with Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga expected to give a press conference in the evening.

The looser measures are expected to set a cap of 10,000 spectators or 50 percent venue capacity at large events, whichever is smaller.

Local media reported late Wednesday that Olympic organisers are likely to use that 10,000 cap for the pandemic-postponed Games that open in Tokyo on July 23.

Overseas fans have already been banned from the Games for the first time ever, and a decision on domestic spectators is expected in the coming days.

A report expected soon from some of the top medical advisers to Japan's government will argue holding the Games without fans would be safest, and will call for additional rules if spectators are allowed, according to

national broadcaster NHK.

With just over a month until the Games open, organisers are attempting to build confidence that the biggest international event since the pandemic began will be safe for participants and the public.

Newly updated virus rulebooks released this week warn athletes they could be expelled from the Games if they violate requirements like mask-wearing and daily testing.

Organisers say more than 80 percent of athletes will be vaccinated and they will be barred from interacting with the Japanese public.

Recent polls have suggested a slight shift in public opposition to holding the Games, with more now in favour of it going ahead than cancelling it.

Previous surveys that offered postponement as an option tended to show most Japanese preferred either another delay or cancellation.

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