

Tokyo reports record virus cases as Japan tightens measures

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People wearing face masks to protect against the spread of the coronavirus walk on a street in Tokyo Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Koji Sasahara

Tokyo on Tuesday reported a record high of COVID-19 cases, as Japan prepared to implement new anti-virus measures amid surging infections

driven by the highly contagious omicron variant.

The capital city logged 12,813 new cases, while Japan's No. 2 business district of Osaka also reported a record caseload of 8,612.

Rising infections have begun to disrupt hospitals, schools and other sectors in some areas.

"We must do everything not to overwhelm the medical systems, so the lives that can be saved will not be lost," Economy Revitalization Minister Daishiro Yamagiwa, who is also in charge of COVID-19 measures, told reporters.

Nationwide, more than 62,000 virus cases were reported, according to Japanese media, for an accumulated total of about 2.2 million cases and some 18,500 deaths. While indicating a new high of infections, the numbers only reflect recorded COVID-19 cases.

A majority of the country—including Tokyo and other [metropolitan areas](#) like Osaka and Kyoto—will be placed under new restrictions from Thursday, with shortened hours for bars and restaurants and curbs on large public events.

The Japanese government has increased hospital capacity for COVID-19 treatment, since last summer when many patients critical patients overflowed from hospitals and died at home, but the country continues to face a shortage of testing capacity.



People wearing face masks to protect against the spread of the coronavirus walk on a street in Tokyo Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Koji Sasahara

Test kits are low in stock, and the [health ministry](#) said COVID-19 patients can be diagnosed based on symptoms, without tests.

The ministry has also cut the self-isolation period for essential workers who have close contact with infected colleagues to six days on condition they test negative, while completely lifting that requirement for medical workers and caregivers in hard-hit Okinawa on condition of daily testing.

"We have to adopt a strategy that is suitable for the omicron," said Shigeru Omi, the government's top medical advisor.

The changes in testing and isolation requirements for essential workers also reflected expert advice that the omicron variant was milder, though more infectious, Omi added.

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