

## Mayor's Message

Hello everyone. I'm FUSHIMI Takashi, Mayor of Hirakata City.

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the central government decided to extend the declaration of emergency state for 11 prefectures including Osaka from February 7<sup>th</sup> to March 7<sup>th</sup>. Osaka Prefectural Government is also asking people to stay at home and to cut restaurants' business hours. In the COVID-19 task force meeting on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, furthermore, Hirakata decided to close city facilities and to cancel or postpone any city events until March 7<sup>th</sup> in order to follow the extension of the declaration. However, if it is lifted earlier than the schedule, we will also rescind those measures.

The number of new corona cases in Osaka tends to be decreasing from the middle of January. For example, the number of weekly new cases in Osaka started to drop since it peaked 3680 cases between January 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. The latest number between 25<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> was less than 2300 cases.

Another index of analysing the COVID-19 cases is "Effective Reproduction Number" that shows "How many people are averagely infected by an infectious individual?". If the number becomes higher, it means that an infectious disease is rapidly spreading. On the other hand, if the number keeps below 1 in consecutive days, an infectious outbreak is being controlled. In Osaka, the effective reproduction number marked 1.64 on January 10<sup>th</sup>. However, since January 17<sup>th</sup>, it has become less than 1. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, it dropped to 0.76.

In January, Hirakata confirmed the so-called clusters in which people were collectively infected with COVID-19. Therefore, the reduction of the number of new cases tends to be a little bit slower than other cities. We recorded the largest number of new corona cases (178 cases) in the week beginning January 18<sup>th</sup>. However, it was reduced to 115 cases between 25<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>.

It can be said that the infectious outbreak of COVID-19 is gradually settling down. Hence, Osaka Prefectural Government made original rules to call for lifting the declaration of emergency state. One of them is "the moving average of new corona cases is blow 300 for seven consecutive days". Osaka achieved this on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. The reason is that everyone including Hirakata's citizens refrained unnecessary outings and moves.

We must never let up on the reins yet. In January, Hirakata's 6 care homes experienced group infections. There, not only elderly residents whose symptom tended to become severe but also care home staff were infected with COVID-19. Once, group infections happen, the number of new patients will explosively rise. If those who need epidemiological studies and daily health checks increase, health centres may face functional limits. In addition, the occupancy rate of hospital bed for severe corona patients remains to be more than 70% in Osaka. Consequently, there is a difficult situation in which other patients cannot smoothly receive proper medical treatments at hospitals.

From last April, Hirakata City Hospital is accepting mild case patients at the request of Osaka Prefectural Government. First, the hospital secured 20 beds for them. But, now 42 beds are used due to the fact that the number of COVID-19 patients has increased. The beds remain to be nearly occupied since January. We should stop the spread of virus and avoid overwhelming hospitals in order to ask the central government to lift the declaration of emergency state as quickly as possible. For doing so, I would like to call for your continuous cooperation.

Hirakata Medical Association, medical institutes, and we are preparing safe vaccinations for all citizens. In order to prevent group infections, furthermore, we are considering introducing support programmes for home patients who cannot be hospitalised. We will let you know the details of them through "Koho Hirakata" and our city website.

Let's get over this daunting situation together.

FUSHIMI Takashi  
Mayor of Hirakata City  
February 5<sup>th</sup> 2021