

Results of the Tokyo-iCDC Risk Communication Team's Group Interview Survey (March, 2023)

March,30 2023

- **Survey Method:** **Group Interviews (120 min.)**
- **Place:** Interview Room in Tokyo
- **Survey Target:** Residents of Tokyo aged from their 20s to 70s, 6 groups of 6 individuals (total of 35 with one absentee)
- **Group Composition:** Designed to prevent bias in **gender, age group, area of residence, or experience with COVID-19**
- **Survey Period:** **March 8 to 11**
- **Interview Items:**
 - Impact of the spread of COVID-19 (positive/negative) - What the end of COVID-19 would look like, coexistence
 - Information that should be provided by Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) in the future
 - What TMG should work on, etc.

<Interview survey>

What kinds of impacts and changes did you notice in terms of the economy, lifestyle, social activities, education, etc., due to COVID-19?

[Negative impacts]

Could not go on trips or outings

"Being unable to go on overseas trips with my family was stressful" (Female in her 20s)
"It's a pity that my father, who is getting on in years, can't go anywhere." (Female in her 50s) and 9 other respondents

Decrease in interactions with people, unable to eat out

"I used to meet with my middle school classmates about once every two months, but that became completely impossible." (Female in her 60s)
"I had been participating in monthly study groups, which allowed me to connect with people outside of the company, but those meetings were cancelled." (Male in his 50s) and 10 other respondents

Could not visit hospitalized patients, could not be with them at the end

"I was hospitalized, and even though my family brought me things, we couldn't even talk." (Female in her 30s)
"A relative died from a disease other than COVID. It was before the vaccine, so we couldn't be with them at the end." (Female in her 40s) and 3 other respondents

Worsened educational environment

"I entered university in April 2020. Although I was in Tokyo I couldn't experience campus life or meet anyone" (Male in his 20s)
"It was sad that my grandson, who was in the 6th grade of elementary school, had no graduation ceremony, no entrance ceremony for junior high, and no club activities, even though he should have been having fun" (Female in her 70s) and 5 other respondents

[Positive impacts]

Work environment improved with the promotion of telework

"My company promoted remote work. That was something completely new for us. The company has really progressed." (Female in her 40s)
"The way we work changed significantly with COVID. Telework and tools like Zoom web meetings became widely adopted." (Male in his 50s) and 8 other respondents

No need to commute due to telework

"Being able to telework allowed me to spend what used to be commuting time sleeping." (Male in his 30s)
"Fortunately, I've been working from home since March 2020. My stress from commuting has decreased." (Male in his 60s) and 4 other respondents

Increased fun online

"My legs aren't good so I can't go out much. It was a good opportunity meet people online through social media who also understood how tough it was staying at home." (Female in her 30s)
"Online food ordering and signed up for a new online streaming service, so I found new ways to spend time at home." (Male in his 20s) and 4 other respondents

Decrease in unpleasant socializing such as drinking parties

"All the things like company year-end parties and drinking parties, where attendance was considered mandatory, disappeared. We don't have to do overtime and can go home early, so the forced stress at work has greatly reduced." (Female in her 40s) and 2 other respondents

- ◆ The COVID-19 pandemic had both **negative and positive effects**.
- ◆ **Negative effects** included **not being able to travel or go out for leisure, and a decrease in interactions with people**, due to **self-imposed restrictions and reducing contact with others**. There were also concerns about the **serious impacts of visitation restrictions at medical institutions** and elderly care facilities, and **the deterioration of the educational environment**.
- ◆ **Positive effects** included changes brought about by the use and spread of online services, such as an **improved work environment with telework and an increase in online entertainment**.

<Interview survey>

It is believed that infections will continue to some extent into the future, but under what circumstances would you consider the pandemic to have "ended"? What would "coexisting with the COVID-19" look like to you?

When it is perceived similarly to the flu

"If it becomes like the flu, a common cold, and continues every year from now on, it will have ended." (Male in his 70s)
"When everyone starts acting as if it's the same as the flu, I'll think things have returned to normal." (Male in his 50s) and 9 other respondents

When it becomes normal to be infected

"When it becomes normal to say 'I got infected with the COVID-19,' and it's no longer something special." (Female in her 60s)
"When anyone can get it, when it becomes normal for many people to be infected, and it's considered normal to be infected" (Female in her 50s) and 3 other respondents

When hospitals treat it the same as other diseases

"When hospitals start treating it normally. When the COVID-19 is not seen as something unique but as a regular disease." (Male in his 30s)
"When medical institutions, including nursing homes, are relaxed, and medical institutions and providers can operate normally, I think that would indicate it's ended."

When hospitals are no longer overwhelmed

Female in her 60s) and 5 other respondents

When treatment drugs become widely available

"When treatment drugs are commercialized and can be bought at the same price as cold medicine. Not only available through prescription at hospitals." (Male in his 40s)
"If drugs become available. Since flu medicine can be prescribed at regular clinics, if a medical treatment becomes available in the same way as for common diseases, then I'd probably consider it to have ended" (Female in her 30s) and 7 other respondents

When the number of infected people significantly decreases

"When watching the news, if the number of serious cases and deaths clearly starts to decrease." (Female in her 50s)
"When the number of infected people drops to single digits, I'd feel it's ended. I don't think it will reach zero, though." (Female in her 60s) and 3 other respondents

When it's no longer reported

"When the daily announcement of the number of infected people on TV stops. They're still doing it every evening, but if that stops, it's ended." (Male in his 20s) 1 respondent

Already considered to be ended/coexisting

"I think COVID-19 has already ended. New infections are decreasing, and its legal status has been shifted from category 2 to category 5, so it's not over, but I think it has settled down." (Male in his 60s)
"I consider it to have ended in my mind because the rate of serious cases is extremely low. Most cases are just like a normal cold." (Male in his 40s) and 4 other respondents

- ◆ Ideas about "the end of COVID-19" and "coexisting with COVID-19" **varied among participants, and some already consider it to have ended.**
- ◆ Participants' **basis for it ending and for coexistence** included not just a **decrease in the number of infections, advances in pharmaceutical treatments, and availability of medical services**, but about a reduced **sense of tension** regarding the disease.

<Interview survey>

What information do you want to be provided by TMG in the future, and what do you want them to work on?

Continue publishing the number of infections	<p>"If the numbers increase, they will probably test what strain it is, so I want them to keep track of the numbers to some extent. Even if it's only estimates, if they say the numbers are increasing, it will make people start being cautious again." (Female in her 40s)</p> <p>"I want daily reports of information on infections. If they stop, what can we rely on? If they cut it off all of a sudden, it could become a big problem." (Male in his 60s) and 5 other respondents</p>
What to do when infected Information on hospitals where consultations are available	<p>"Information on vaccines and hospitals" (Male in his 70s)</p> <p>"When think I might be infected, who I should contact before going to the doctor. How to deal with it." (Male in his 70s) and 7 other respondents</p>
Information dissemination to employers, hospitals, schools	<p>"Rather than the general public, I want them to appeal more to employers and hospitals. It's difficult for a single company to make a decision. If they provide guidelines, companies can make decisions more easily." (Male in his 30s)</p> <p>"Through schools. I have children. I want schools to be the first places to spread information that it's safe." (Male in his 50s) and 3 other respondents</p>
Support for vaccine/treatment costs	<p>"Some people won't get vaccinated unless it's free, so it would be good if the elderly could get it for free." (Female in her 60s)</p> <p>"I would be grateful if medical expenses were subsidized. Depending on the age group. I want generous support for the elderly and those with underlying conditions." (Female in her 60s) and 11 other respondents</p>
Organizing responses at hospitals	<p>"I want the system that enabled coordination among medical institutions and prevented people being passed around from place-to-place to continue for other diseases." (Male in his 30s)</p> <p>"Currently, only special hospitals are accepting COVID-19 patients, but if regular hospitals could also start accepting them, it would be reassuring." (Male in his 40s) and 7 other respondents</p>
Utilize the experience for the future	<p>"Don't let the considerations and achievements made for COVID-19 fade away. There are sure to be new pandemics in the future, so I want this experience to become a basis for dealing with them. (Male in his 30s)</p> <p>"In the future, there might be another pandemic of this magnitude. Don't let the response to COVID-19 fade away; I want these measures used for similar situations." (Female in her 50s) and 4 other respondents</p>

- ◆ There is a desire for continued provision of information regarding the **number of infections** (trends of increase or decrease) and **what to do in case of infection (who to contact/where to receive diagnosis)**.
- ◆ Some expressed that they also wanted **information to be provided to employers, hospitals, and schools**.
- ◆ Others expressed a desire for the **medical framework that was produced**, and the **experience gained, to be utilized in the future**.

<Summary>

- The spread of COVID-19 has had various impacts on the lives of Tokyo's residents, **both positive and negative**.
- Many respondents are aware of the possibility of being infected and needing treatment due to future waves of infections. **They have vague anxieties** about "**how to receive medical treatment in the future**" and "**how much medical expenses will be.**"
- **Perceptions regarding the end of COVID-19 vary** but involves not only **progress in the medical provision system** but also **reduced tension**.