

Recent trends in COVID-19 and Influenza

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On May 5, 2023, the World Health Organization announced that the “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” would end after 3 years and 3 months regarding the novel coronavirus infection that has spread worldwide. In Japan, on May 8, 2023, the classification of COVID-19 based on the Infectious Diseases Control Law (comprehensive consideration of infectivity, severity, etc.) changed from "category 2: equivalent" to "category 5" infections. Until that change, the government had made various requests and interventions based on the law, but since this change, the infectious disease control measures have been left to the public's voluntary efforts, respecting individual choices.

Recently the number of COVID-19 infections has not been reported, and it is difficult for us to understand the current status of the pandemic. However, the “number of cases per sentinel” is regularly reported on the web page of “COVID-19 Information and Resources” (Cabinet Secretariat) and “Tokyo Metropolitan Infectious Disease Surveillance Center”. According to this information, the number of COVID-19 cases per sentinel has been steadily increasing since the change made in May until early September. It peaked in mid-September and has been on a downward trend recently. However, we still need to be careful to avoid infection.

From the perspective of mutant strains of the COVID-19 virus, various mutant strains are spreading around the world, with each mutant strain continuing to mutate themselves. Currently, the dominant strain in Omicron variants is estimated to be EG.5, after passing through BA.4, BA.5, and XBB.1. Among each mutant strain, there appear to be some differences in immune evasion, symptoms, and disease severity. Generally, symptoms tend to be more severe in cases of first infection or in cases of unvaccinated patients.

In addition, influenza infections have been occurring sporadically and persistently this year in Tokyo, and the situation continues to exceed the standard for the start of an epidemic (1 person per sentinel). In mid-September, the number of influenza infections per sentinel exceeded 11, which is greater than the "standard for the infection advisory" (10 people per sentinel), and is currently rapidly increasing. There is a possibility that the epidemic may spread further, so it is important to be careful and take infection control measures.

When infected with COVID-19 or influenza, there are some differences in the clinical course of infection, but usually, after an incubation period of several days, several cold-like

symptoms occur, such as fever (or high fever), fatigue, headaches, sore throat, runny nose, and coughing. It is difficult to distinguish between these two diseases based on symptoms alone. So, in order to get a correct diagnosis, some examinations are required at a medical institution. Also, other infectious and non-infectious diseases may cause similar symptoms, so if you have a fever or feel unwell, please visit a medical institution, such as a clinic or hospital, to get diagnosed and receive appropriate treatment.

In accordance with previous university measures, if you have an “infectious disease that should be prevented at school”, including both COVID-19 and influenza, you will be suspended from attending classes during a certain period (see details below). This period of absence will be treated as an “official absence”, but in order to do so, you need to complete the “notification of official absence” procedure. The details of the procedure are listed in the “Notification of Official Absence and Notification of Reasons for Class Absence (公欠届及び授業欠席事由届 in Japanese)” section of "Various Notifications (各種届出 in Japanese)" on the university web page, so please check it yourself, prepare the necessary documents, and apply at the Educational Affairs Division of TUFS.

The (standard) period for suspension of attendance differs depending on the infection, so please note the following points.

<Period of suspension of attendance>

COVID-19: Until 5 days have passed after the onset of symptoms (the day after the onset of fever is counted as day 1), and until 1 day has passed after symptoms improve.

(Note) "Symptoms improve" means that the fever has reduced without taking any antipyretics (fever medicine) and that the respiratory symptoms tend to have improved.

Influenza: Until 5 days have passed after the onset of symptoms (the day after the onset of fever is counted as day 1), and until 2 days have passed after the fever reduces.

(Note) 1. “Fever reduces” means that the fever has come down without taking any antipyretics (fever medicine).

(Note) 2. Even if the fever is relieved early with anti-viral medicines, the infectivity still remains, so you will not be allowed to attend until 5 days have passed from the onset of symptoms.

If you have any questions, please consult with the Health Care Center, TUFS.

References:

COVID-19 Information and Resources” (Cabinet Secretariat) (in Japanese)

<https://corona.go.jp/various-data/>

Tokyo Metropolitan Infectious Disease Surveillance Center (in Japanese)

<https://idsc.tmiph.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/>

“TUFS web page (in Japanese) > To Current Students (in Japanese) > “Notification of Official Absence and Notification of Reasons for Class Absence (in Japanese)” > “Various Notifications (in Japanese)”.

<https://www.tufs.ac.jp/student/procedure/>

https://www.tufs.ac.jp/documents/student/procedure/kyomu_kesseki_process.pdf