

May 21, 2009
Etsuo Mekata, Director
The Hakuho Foundation

Urgent Notice

Re: Cancellation of the 2nd Japan Experience Program for Overseas Children, a part of the Hakuho Scheme for a Global Children's Japanese Language Network

We regret to announce that given the increasing spread of the new strain of influenza in Japan, all activities of the 2nd Japan Experience Program for Overseas Children, which was due to be held from May 31–Jun 9, 2009, have been cancelled to prevent the potential for infection and spread of influenza as a result of the program's implementation. We very much regret the inconvenience to all who were preparing to come to Japan and to their Japanese hosts. We deeply regret having to make this decision, but request your understanding given the current circumstances.

1. Current situation of the new influenza strain in Japan

Since its announcement to the world on April 23, 10,000 people in 41 countries have become infected with the new strain of influenza, with numbers continuing to rise. While not as virulent as first feared, the new influenza has caused 80 deaths around the world.

The first case in Japan was reported on May 8, and the infection has continued to spread since then, mainly amongst high school students in Western Japan. The first case in Tokyo was reported on May 20. At 267, Japan now has the fourth largest number of cases, following Mexico, the United States and Canada, and with the infection now present in highly densely populated Tokyo, there is potential for the infection to spread further in this country.

While initially no cases were reported in the countries and areas that were to participate in the Program this time, cases have now been confirmed in India, Malaysia and Thailand. The situation in those countries now needs to be monitored.

2. Features of the Japan Experience Program for Overseas Children

Avoiding crowded places, washing hands and gargling after returning from outdoors,

and staying at least 1 meter away from others to avoid airborne droplet infection are some of the ways of preventing infection with the influenza virus. Prioritizing social experiences in Japan and direct interactions with Japanese students, the Japan Experience Program for Overseas Children is structured to include visits to various spots in Tokyo, close communication in discussions during school visits, home stays, etc., as well as a jamboree at Gotemba, which was to be attended by around 100 people. Any of these activities could easily facilitate the spread of infection if any participant was to become infected.

3. Response to influenza in Japan and by the Hakuho Foundation

Given that a number of sports events and concerts have been cancelled in Japan as a result of the spread of the new influenza, it is likely that schools and parents in Japan and abroad will be increasingly uneasy about sending their children to Japan to participate in this Program.

Until now, the Foundation has conducted checks to ensure that infected people are not among those invited to participate in our programs. However, as a practical consideration, it would be difficult for us to provide a failsafe framework for checking for infection, and quarantining and treating any infected participants that should develop symptoms during the Program period.

Moreover, depending on the spread of the infection, measures such as the closure of schools and confinement indoors are a possibility that would make participation in the Program impossible.

In light of the above, the 2nd Japan Experience Program for Overseas Children, which was to be held from May 31–June 9, has been cancelled in order to prevent infection of spread of the new strain of influenza. Please note that that the Program has been cancelled and not postponed. The Hakuho Foundation will consider the future of the opportunities for interaction anticipated in this Program and make an announcement at a later date.

Contact for inquiries:

Terayama, Saito

Hakuho Scheme for a Global Children's Japanese Language Network Secretariat

Tel: +81-(0)3-3263-8695