

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL TAKAKO ITO

April 2020

The Novel Coronavirus has wreaked havoc around the world since my previous message was posted last month. Ontario and Japan are no exceptions, and both have since experienced unprecedented challenges.

A state of emergency was declared in Ontario on March 17, and, as of this writing, will continue until May 12. All but essential businesses have been shut down, gatherings of more than five people have been prohibited and various other measures have been put in place. Schools across the province have been closed, and it is not yet known when they will resume. Toronto regulations now require persons not living together to be physically separated by at least two meters in parks and public squares or otherwise face a fine. At the federal level, strict immigration restrictions, as well as mandatory self-isolation after entering Canada, have been imposed, greatly limiting the movement of people. Our Consulate-General is located in an area of downtown Toronto considered the hub of Canadian business and culture. Since the emergency declaration, however, we hardly see anyone about.

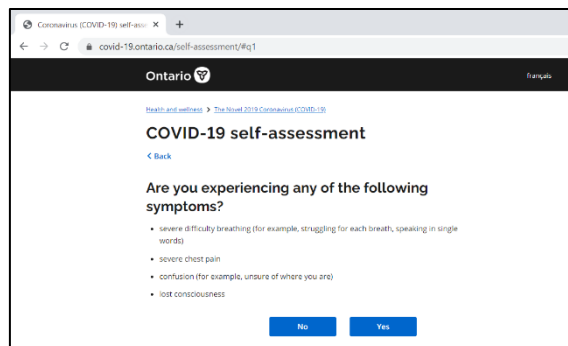


[Take Action to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 infographic](#) (Toronto Public Health)

No one could have imagined that such measures would be invoked during peacetime in a democratic developed country like Canada, restricting the activities of so many of its citizens. Battling an invisible enemy like the Novel Coronavirus can be a source of great anxiety. However, we at least know what needs to be done to defend ourselves. Please closely follow prescribed measures such as: staying home as much as possible; washing your hands often; and avoiding the 3 Cs; closed areas (poorly ventilated spaces), crowds and close contact with others.

If you suspect you might be infected with the Novel Coronavirus, please use the

Ontario Government's self-assessment tool (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-self-assessment>), and, if necessary, contact Telehealth Ontario or your primary health care provider. In Ontario, testing for the Novel Coronavirus, as well as hospitalization (if required due to the virus), are available free of charge regardless of whether you possess an Ontario Health (OHIP) card. At the same time, however, cases of Novel Coronavirus are being given priority for treatment at health care facilities, and there are directives in place allowing for the postponement or cancellation of non-emergency medical treatments. Therefore, please take care also to maintain your general health and to avoid injury.



[COVID-19 self-assessment](https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-self-assessment) (Government of Ontario)

Our Consulate-General has now also implemented an appointment system for our consular services in order to avoid visitors being infected by others in our waiting room. We are also answering inquiries on consular issues over the telephone. Although many of our staff are now also working from home, we will continue to take measures to meet your needs with respect to consular services. Given current directives to stay at home as much as possible, please refrain from coming to our office for non-essential or non-urgent matters. Please first confirm by phone whether it is necessary to visit our Consulate-General in person.



[COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
(Consulate-General of Japan in Toronto)

A state of emergency was also declared in Japan on April 7 and is now applied throughout the country, restricting contact among people and requesting business closures. At the press conference where the state of emergency was declared, Prime Minister Abe made mention of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. Nine years ago, we lost many irreplaceable lives to the sudden earthquake and tsunami. Memories of the difficult and extremely anxious days

which followed the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power station are etched deeply in the minds of everyone who were in Japan as well as those people whose family members and friends were in Japan at the time. We have come a long way since then, due to the kind and generous support that gathered from across Japan and around the world. Now, once again confronted with tremendous difficulties, we must ascertain what we can and should do, and do what we know to do in order to at least prevent the current situation from worsening. We need to work together in both Japan and Canada to avoid the worst and to overcome these challenges, keeping in mind that “after night comes the day”.

The Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, which had been scheduled for this summer, have also been postponed for a year, and the torch relay that was to commence on March 26 has been cancelled for now. Given the current situation, the decision to postpone the Games has been well understood by the people of Canada and elsewhere, as it was to realize one of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic visions – “striving for your best – and to ensure conditions in which the athletes can compete at their best and spectators can enjoy the events with peace of mind, as well as to welcome people from around the world with the distinctly Japanese form of hospitality known as “omotenashi”. To hold the Olympic and Paralympic Games in their complete form as proof that humankind has defeated the Novel Coronavirus is now our new goal. Our events here locally to promote the Games have been postponed as well. Although we cannot say how long the current state of emergency will last, we would like to take the forward-looking perspective that this is extra time given to us to make even better preparations for the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Thanks to 21st-century technology, people can stay connected virtually even when prohibited from leaving their homes. On March 29, the National Japanese Speech Contest was held online. The winners of the regional contests from seven cities across Canada were supposed to gather in Toronto for the event, but due to current conditions, the competition was moved online. A total of 28 regional winners in four categories from “beginner” to “open” participated. Although I was unable to speak and offer encouragement to each of them in person, I fully appreciated this significant opportunity in which passion for the Japanese language was further boosted and motivation for improving Japanese

language was elevated.

In Toronto's High Park, where in April 2019 we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the donation of Sakura trees by the citizens of Tokyo, measures reportedly will be put in place to keep crowds from gathering this year when the flowers are in bloom. Because we wish for people to have at least some opportunity to enjoy Sakura,



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we have commenced "Virtual Flower Viewings" on April 14. On each weekday until May 12, a photo of a beautiful location in Japan that is famous for its Sakura will be posted on our Facebook page. As well, whenever we receive a "like" our staff will fold an origami Sakura flower and place it on a tree painted on a large piece of paper. When we receive a lot of "likes", this tree will be in full bloom. We sincerely hope you will enjoy helping to bring the joy of Sakura to Ontario even at a time like this.

I am sure all of you are finding these days very challenging, but, in closing, I would like to offer two quotes by Helen Keller, who herself lived with unimaginable difficulties and yet travelled around the world and made great contributions in the fields of education and welfare:

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it."

"Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow."