

Japan considers cheer-free Olympics in new COVID fan rules

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A volunteer holds a placard showing COVID prevention measures at the BMX freestyle track venue during a test event for the Tokyo 2020 Games at Ariake Urban Sports Park in Tokyo on May 17, 2021 [CharlyY Triballeau/AFP]

Tokyo, May 31 (RHC)-- Fans attending the Tokyo Olympics this July might need to be vaccinated or test negative for COVID-19 before they can attend any of the events -- and cheering, eating, high-fives and drinking alcohol would also be banned under controls now being considered by the organizers.

The Yomiuri Shimbun, a Japanese newspaper, reported that organizers are set to decide in June how many spectators – if any – will be allowed to attend the Games, which have already been postponed by a year because of the pandemic. Many Japanese would like to see the event cancelled given the coronavirus has yet to be brought under control.

“The plan is to stop the spread of infections during Games time with strict countermeasures,” the paper said on Monday. Under the plan, spectators must be able to show a vaccination certificate or a negative test taken at their own expense no more than a week before the Olympic event they plan to attend.

They will also have to wear masks and fill in health-check sheets, and once inside must not cheer loudly or high-five each other. Fans travelling from overseas have already been banned and the paper said any local fans who break the rules could be denied entrance or removed. Security guards would be stationed around the different venues to monitor behaviour, the report said, with public viewing venues cancelled or scaled down.

The report was met with outrage among some social media users, with thousands of tweets criticising the country's continued push to host the Olympics in the middle of a pandemic. The term “negative test certificate” was trending on Twitter in Japan, garnering more than 8,000 tweets on Monday morning.

Australia's Olympic softball squad left Sydney for their pre-Games training camp in Japan on Monday. They are among the first athletes to arrive in Japan for the delayed Tokyo Olympics [Nick Mulvenney/Reuters]

Japan's top government spokesman, Katsunobu Kato, told reporters on Monday he was not aware that any decision had been made regarding the issue.

The Tokyo Olympics organizing committee did not immediately respond to a Reuters news agency email requesting comment on the report. On Friday, Japan announced it was extending a state of emergency in Tokyo and other areas to June 20. The country has seen a record number of COVID-19 patients in critical condition in recent days, even as the pace of new infections has slowed.

Japan's vaccine rollout has been moving slowly, with less than 2.5 percent of the population fully vaccinated so far. A nationwide poll published by the Nikkei paper on Monday found that 62 percent of respondents were in favor of cancelling or delaying the Games, a result in line with previous polls by other media outlets.

A Monday poll in the Yomiuri, meanwhile, showed 49 percent of people living in Tokyo want the Games to go ahead, while 48 percent want them cancelled. Organizers have repeatedly ruled out the Games being postponed again, and a number of test events have been held.

On Monday, Australia's women's softball team left Sydney for their training camp in Gunma prefecture in Japan becoming some of the first athletes to arrive in the country. Outfielder Jade Wall said the delay had not lessened the excitement for the squad. “We just can't wait to get there,” the 32-year-old told reporters at Sydney airport.

“We know it’s going to be a long trek over there, we know we’ve got to go through lots and lots of COVID testing but we’re all prepared for it. “We know we’ve got one goal in mind. I know that any difficulties we face, we’ll face them together.”

The Tokyo Olympics Games are due to start on July 23.

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