

We urge Olympic organizers to immediately withdraw a “special rule” for close-contact athletes and implement thorough infection-control measures for players and others involved in the games.

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The Cabinet Secretariat and the Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games on July 15 created a “special rule” that allows those who have had close contact with a COVID-19 patient to participate in the games if the result of a PCR test conducted within six hours prior to the games is negative. They are actually implementing the rule, which is contrary to established infection-control measures. Moreover, it becomes clear from remarks of those involved that an athlete who refuses to play with the close contact will lose the game. This is a system that forces athletes to participate in the games knowing infection risks.

On the other hand, the Health Ministry’s “Q&A on COVID-19 (for general public)” updated on the same day calls on “close contacts to pay attention to their health conditions (health observation) and refrain from going out for nonessential and non-urgent purposes for 14 days after contacting with an infected person.” This rule has been maintained throughout Japan and never been changed since the first infection case was confirmed domestically.

By setting the “special rule,” the Cabinet Secretariat and the Organizing Committee have arbitrarily changed the foundation of infection-control measures that have been built up since last year for the sake of hosting the Olympic Games. This should never be overlooked.

To those who are following various self-restraint measures and staying at home in order to contain the spread of infections, such a response sends a harmful message that there is no need to stay at home. It will foolishly ruin the relationship of trust between citizens and medical institutions, such as public health centers, which is the most important factor in deterring the spread of infections.

This inappropriate change of rules was made based on the organizers’ decision that preventing infection among athletes must become a secondary concern in order to continue the games in light of the facts that many athletes and others involved in the games have become infected patients or close contacts and that the number of new cases has increased every day in the host city of Tokyo. This must never be accepted.

The highest priority should be given to the safety of athletes and others involved in the games and prevention of infections among them. As this becomes unattainable, we strongly urge the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games to be cancelled. We also demand that the “special rule” be withdrawn immediately and that measures be taken to protect the lives of athletes and others involved in the games.