



## EDITORIAL | Japan's 'X-Factor' in COVID-19 Immunity Should Be Considered in Vaccine Development

Late July reportedly marked the peak of the “second wave” of the novel coronavirus outbreak in Japan. Compared to the earlier state of emergency period, the rise of serious cases here followed a gentler slope.

Although by no means infallible, treatment methods such as drug use have been hammered out based on experience accumulated to date. Likewise, efforts at hospitals and facilities have led to fewer infections among the elderly.

Despite these successes, we must not let our guard down. We need to continue to handle the situation with a sense of urgency.

Meanwhile, utilizing knowledge acquired to date, researchers must hurry to shed light on this disease. Knowing what is key to preventing infections and stopping them from worsening will give a boost to the development of drugs and other treatment methods.

Moreover, there is great significance in advancing this research in Japan. Compared to countries in Europe and North America, the number of infections per capita in Japan is low, as is the death rate.

There has been talk of some sort of an “X factor” playing a role in preventing severe cases in Japan and other East Asian nations.

Antibody tests performed by the government in June showed the antibody retention ratio in the Tokyo metropolitan area to be strikingly low compared to rates in Europe and the United States during the same period. Some have pointed to fewer PCR tests being responsible for the comparatively low number in Japan, suggesting Japan has turned a blind eye to infections.

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However, Japan examined “excess mortality” in an attempt to infer the number of deaths caused by COVID-19 — by using statistics to reveal how many more deaths have occurred compared to the same period in the average year. The data showed no remarkable increase in deaths in Japan, such as “excess mortality,” between January and April 2020, unlike those seen in other countries.

Various rumors have spread about possible reasons. These include differences in daily living habits involving face masks and hand-washing, differences in obesity rates, numbers of people suffering from diabetes linked to severity of illness, differences in medical treatment and nursing care, and differences in immune function due to past BCG vaccines.

There is also a theory that immune cells previously infected by another coronavirus could be responsible for creating “cross immunity” to the novel coronavirus.

All of these remain but theories. At this point, it is extremely risky to just accept and move ahead with the optimistic view that “Japanese people don’t easily catch the virus” or “rarely have serious cases.”

If there are indeed differences in immunity, any vaccine developed in Europe or the United States would not necessarily have the same level of effectiveness or safety in Japan. Clinical trials in Japan must not be neglected in the approval process for any vaccine.

As we scramble to understand the nature of this virus, we must also try our best to elucidate this “X factor.” The health and safety of our citizens is at stake.

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## 【主張】ファクターX 楽観論排し解明に全力を

新型コロナウイルス感染症の「第2波」のピークは、7月下旬だったとされる。緊急事態宣言当時と比べ、重症者の増え方は緩やかだ。

医療の経験の積み重ねから、万全ではないが薬の使い方など治療法が編み出された。病院や施設などの努力で、高齢者の感染が少なかった。

そうであっても油断は禁物である。引き続き緊張感をもって対処したい。

同時に、研究者にはこれまでの知見を糧に、疾患の解明を急いでほしい。何が感染や重症化を抑える鍵であるかが分かれば治療薬や治療法の開発にも弾みがつく。

こうした研究を、日本で進めることには意義がある。欧米各国と比べ、日本は人口当たりの感染者数が少なく、死亡率も低い。

日本や東アジア諸国には、重症化を防ぐ何らかの要素「ファクターX」があるのではないかと、いわれている。

政府が6月に行った抗体検査では、東京都の抗体保有率は同時期の欧米などに比べて著しく低かった。日本の感染者数が比較的少ない点について、PCR検査が少なく見逃したのではないかと指摘もある。

だが、全体の死亡者が例年の同時期と比べてどれほど多いかを示す「超過死亡」を割り出して新型コロナ由来の死亡を類推しようとしても、日本の1～4月には、諸外国の「超過死亡」のような顕著な増加は確認されなかった。

さまざまな理由が取り沙汰されている。マスクや手洗いなど生活習慣の違い、重症化を招く肥満や糖尿病患者の数の違い、医療・介護の違い、BCGなど過去のワクチン接種による免疫機能の違い—などだ。以前に別のコロナウイルスに感染した免疫細胞が、新型コロナに反応する「交差免疫」を起こしたという見方もある。

いずれも仮説である。今の時点で「日本人はかかりにくい」「重症化しにくい」といった楽観論に走るのは危険すぎる。

免疫の働きに違いがあれば、欧米で開発されたワクチンの効果や安全性が日本では同様でないこともあり得る。承認には日本での治験をおろそかにすべきでない。

疾患の正体が分からず手探りで進む中で、「ファクターX」の解明に力を尽くさねばならない。国民の健康と安全をどう守るかが問われている。

出典：【主張】ファクターX 楽観論排し解明に全力を

<https://japan-forward.com/japanese/> 【主張】ファクターX 楽観論排し解明に全力を/