

NATIONAL

No kissing and no sharing food: Japan's night spots call for more realistic virus measures

REUTERS, KYODO

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Campaigners for Japan's nightlife workers say they need realistic guidelines for how to stay safe and remain in business amid the pandemic, which has seen the government zero in on host and hostess bars as virus hot spots.

Bar staff need [practical rules](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/15/national/tokyo-host-clubs-coronavirus-video/#.XxZTG54zbIU) (<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/15/national/tokyo-host-clubs-coronavirus-video/#.XxZTG54zbIU>) on how to interact with customers, said Shinya Iwamuro, a urologist and public health advocate who has been teaching infection control measures in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward and other nightspots.

That means no kissing, no sharing food and conversations at right angles, rather than face-to-face, to avoid droplet contamination.

"As much as possible, kiss only with your partner, and avoid deep kissing," Iwamuro told a news conference in Tokyo on Monday, outlining what he described as "kiss etiquette."

Strategic testing in the nightlife districts of Tokyo has revealed [rising daily cases of the coronavirus](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/21/national/tokyo-coronavirus-deaths/#.XxZUmJ4zbIU) (<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/21/national/tokyo-coronavirus-deaths/#.XxZUmJ4zbIU>), predominantly among people in their 20s and 30s. The clusters prompted Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike to [raise the city's alert](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/15/national/tokyo-coronavirus-alert/#.XxZUiZ4zbIU) (<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/15/national/tokyo-coronavirus-alert/#.XxZUiZ4zbIU>) to the highest "red" level on July 15.

With cases in Tokyo nearing 300 a day late last week, officials excluded people traveling to and from the capital from a government campaign aimed at reviving domestic tourism.

The government is also considering toughening its special measures act that allows it to declare a state of emergency. Media reported Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga as saying there may be more spot checks of nightlife businesses.

But concern has grown that nightlife has merely become a scapegoat for the failure of authorities to track and contain the disease.

Masayuki Saijo, director of virology at the National Institute of Infectious Diseases, said it was not appropriate to discriminate against people based on where or when they work.

"There's no difference, working at night or working in the day," Saijo said. "The strategy to reduce human-to-human infection is the same."

The host and hostess scene provides a kind of safety net for many Japanese seeking work, particularly single mothers, said Kaori Koga, representative director of the Nightlife Business Association.

More than a million people are estimated to work in the industry, she said.

Her group has drafted its own safety rules for its members, including disinfecting microphones used for karaoke, as it found government recommendations, such as the use of masks and keeping a distance of 2 meters, were impractical, she told reporters.

“Nothing will change if you’re only criticizing us as the bad guys,” Koga said, adding the government hadn’t acknowledged their rules nor offered enough financial help to businesses or workers.

“Neither the central government nor the Tokyo Metropolitan Government are making efforts to come up with a fundamental solution,” Koga said.

Koga said social distancing, as requested by the government, is unrealistic for their businesses, as many clubs are small, and that compliance may mean only two customers can be entertained at one time. As it is, wearing masks makes chatting and toasting hard for clients and hosts, she added.

She warned that such unrealistic guidelines will lead to noncompliance by some.

She also suggested setting up an online certification system for nightlife workers to prove their understanding of hygiene and disease prevention. The idea is that the more the workers are certified, the more it would boost their establishments’ reputation.

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