

Responses to the Spread of COVID-19 in France

- Observation from the viewpoint of a Japanese resident

1. Introduction

On 11 May 2020, approximately 8 weeks since the lockdown was declared on 17 March, the Government of France cautiously started the first phase of easing the restrictions. On 2 June, the second phase began, and taking into account the situations, the third phase will be implemented on 22 June.

The Government imposed the lockdown without any preparedness among people physically and psychologically. On the contrary, the easing of restrictions has been conducted with great caution.

This report is written by a Japanese residing in France. It focuses on efforts to stopping the spread of COVID-19 as well as challenges for the way forward after easing the lockdown (some contents in this report might be different from other areas of France).

2. Situation in France

As of 31 May, the number of confirmed cases with COVID-19 is 148,436 persons and the death is 28,717 persons.

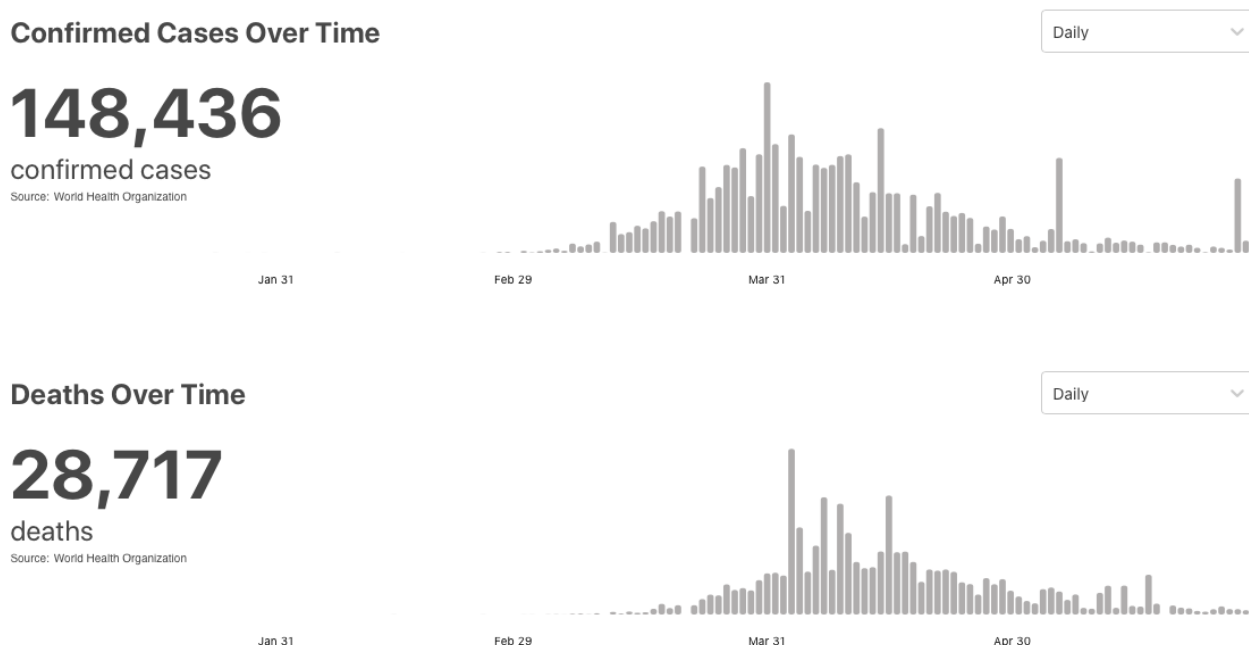


Fig. 1 The numbers of confirmed cases and deaths with COVID-19 in France¹

¹ World Health Organisation (WHO)

3. Preventive Actions: Lockdown

Below is a quick glance of policy differences between France and Japan for fighting against COVID-19.

Table 1 Policy Differences in COVID-19 Preventive Actions Between France and Japan

Preventive Action	France	Japan
Staying Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mandatory - Imposition of lockdowns - Legally binding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-Mandatory - No imposition of lockdowns (drawing on individual responsibility and cooperation)
Physical Distancing	Keeping at least 1 meter distance	Avoidance of 3Cs: crowds, closed spaces, closed contacts
Work	Promoted tele-work, except essential workers for COVID-19	Promoted tele-work, except essential workers for COVID-19
School	Closed (Distance learning)	Closed (Some schools conducted distance learning)
Selling Masks/Disinfection Gels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Under the control of the government (before and during lockdown) - Sales on an adequate price (after lockdown) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hard to buy or prices went up
Wearing /Distributing Masks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not encouraged at the beginning. - Became compulsory to wear one on public transport (after lockdown). - Many municipalities distributed masks to residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraged, but not legislated. - There is a culture of wearing masks even before the crisis. - The government provided two masks for each household.
Washing Hands	Encouraged	Encouraged

In order to confront increasing cases of COVID-19 in France, President Emmanuel Macron, through a televised address to the nation on 12 March², announced that all schools and universities would be closed from 16 March. In view of this measure, he guaranteed that the Government would extend economic and financial support to those who would be temporarily unemployed.

² Ambassade de France à Tokyo: <https://jp.ambafrance.org/article15553>

However, the situation got worse rapidly, and the French government announced that the current situation was on Phase 3 of the epidemic and all the shops except grocery stores, fuel stations, banks, and pharmacies would be closed from the midnight of 14 March.

Again, on 16 March, President Macron spoke to the nation³. He said, “We are at war with COVID-19”, thereby declaring a 15-day lockdown from 17 March.

Following the declaration, gathering of people including friends and families was banned. People can go out only for the following: to shop for essential items (keeping 1 meter physical distance), to work if your work is essential and cannot be done from home, to do physical exercise maximum of one hour (within 1km of your home), and to report for urgent medical appointment and for vital family reasons carrying a form (Fig. 2) filled with necessary information. Violating an order incurs a penalty of 135 euro or more.

ATTESTATION DE DÉPLACEMENT DÉROGATOIRE

En application de l'article 3 du décret du 23 mars 2020 prescrivant les mesures générales nécessaires pour faire face à l'épidémie de COVID-19 dans le cadre de l'état d'urgence sanitaire. Je soussigné(e),

Mme/M. : _____
Né(e) le : _____
A : _____
Démocrant :

certifie que mon déplacement est lié au motif suivant (cocher la case adéquate par l'article 3 du décret du 23 mars 2020 prescrivant les mesures générales nécessaires pour faire face à l'épidémie de COVID-19 dans le cadre de l'état d'urgence sanitaire) :

Déplacements entre le domicile et le lieu d'exercice de l'activité professionnelle, lorsqu'ils sont indispensables à l'exercice d'activités ne pouvant être organisées sous forme de télétravail ou déplacements professionnels ne pouvant être différés ;

Déplacements pour effectuer des achats de fournitures nécessaires à l'activité professionnelle et des achats de première nécessité dans des établissements dont les activités demeurent autorisées (État sur gouvernement.fr) ;

Consultations et soins ne pouvant être assurés à distance et ne pouvant être différés ; consultations et soins des patients atteints d'une affection de longue durée ;

Déplacements pour motif médical impérieux, pour l'assistance aux personnes vulnérables ou les garde d'enfants ;

Déplacements brefs, dans la limite d'une heure quotidienne et dans un rayon maximal d'un kilomètre autour du domicile, liés soit à l'activité physique individuelle des personnes, à l'exclusion de toute pratique sportive collective et de toute proximité avec d'autres personnes, soit à la promenade avec les autres personnes regroupées dans un même domicile, soit aux besoins des animaux de compagnie ;

Convocation judiciaire ou administrative ;

Participation à des missions d'intérêt général sur demande de l'autorité administrative ;

Fait à : _____ le _____ à _____ h
(Date et heure de début de sortie à mentionner obligatoirement)

Signature : _____

Les données personnelles figurant sur ce formulaire sont collectées automatiquement par le service de l'Etat afin de permettre l'émission de ce document par portail web. Elles sont destinées à être utilisées dans le cadre de la lutte contre la pandémie de COVID-19. Elles ne peuvent être diffusées à d'autres personnes que celles qui ont fourni les données. Elles ne peuvent être utilisées à d'autres fins que celles pour lesquelles elles ont été collectées. Elles ne peuvent être utilisées à d'autres fins que celles pour lesquelles elles ont été collectées. Elles ne peuvent être utilisées à d'autres fins que celles pour lesquelles elles ont été collectées.

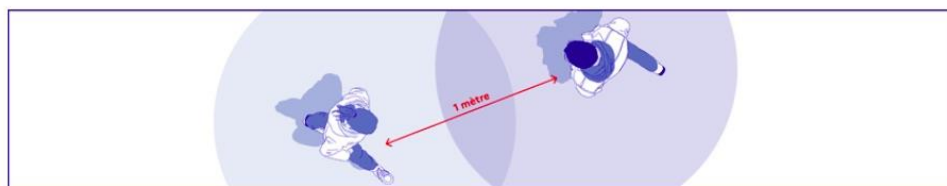
Fig. 2 Form (Attestation)

Luttons ensemble contre le Covid-19



En l'absence de traitement, la meilleure des protections pour vous et pour vos proches est, en permanence, le respect des mesures barrières et de la distanciation physique. En complément, portez un masque quand la distance d'un mètre ne peut pas être respectée.

La distance physique



Pour tenir la maladie à distance, restez à plus d'un mètre de distance les uns des autres.

Fig. 3 Publication for COVID-19 in France⁴ (Physical distance in France is 1 meter)

3-1. Economic Measures

In the first televised address presented by President Macron on 12 March, he guaranteed payroll for parents

³ Ambassade de France à Tokyo: <https://jp.ambafrance.org/article15565>

⁴ Le Gouvernement de la République française: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus>

and other employees on leave as he announced the closure of nursery schools, elementary and junior high schools, high schools, and colleges from 16 March. In response to this statement, many workers were able to stay home without commuting to workplace (the compensation for partial unemployment is about 84% of salaries).

In the second speech of the President on 16 March, he announced that the government guaranteed up to 300 billion euro including: deferment of tax and social security payments; extension of repayment of bank loans; extension of payment of taxes, social insurance, water, electricity and gas bills and rent for small business enterprises at risk; expanded the ideas of partial unemployment; and set up a national solidarity fund for entrepreneurs, craftsmen, and merchants.

During the third address made by the President on 13 April 2020⁵, he announced that maintaining protective measures for workers and businesses (partial unemployment, financing), special plans/exceptions for contribution/special assistance for industries affected by the crisis over the long term (tourism, food, hotels, culture, events, etc.), and special assistance for low-income families with children, and students in unstable situations. In addition, special allowance would be provided to essential workers including health care professionals and public servants who have been tackling the virus.

Furthermore, on 24 April 2020, the French authority announced a historic funding to the Air France-KLM Group and Air France to help overcome the crisis. With this funding, the authority demanded the group's commitment to institute economic, financial, and environmental transformations.⁶

3-2. School Education

The closure of all schools from 16 March was announced by President Macron on his first address made on 12 March. On the same day, the Minister of National Education stated that education wouldn't be disrupted by this crisis, but would be continued remotely. After these announcements, not only school officials, but television companies joined the seamless efforts to continue education remotely in France.

In the case of my son who goes to a primary school, his teacher provided distance learning, but not online learning. The teacher of my son sent us each day instruction for a coming week by email, and tasks and materials are available on online bulletin board sites. Then parents need to print them out and children work on them every day. The materials include audio, movie, and online materials.

A week passed after the lockdown, she contacted all the parents of her class and asked to fill in a questionnaire form for providing better distance learning from the weeks after. Reflecting the survey result, she modified the ways to provide tasks to students and it continued onward. She also introduced online classes sometimes to confirm progress made by children, to see if children have any questions or provide theme-specific lessons to those who need to be explained better.

⁵ Ambassade de France à Tokyo: <https://jp.ambafrance.org/article15653>

⁶ JETRO: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/biznews/2020/04/e1b52a5700f7c0da.html>

I have been very impressed with her efforts to continue education for her students even in this crisis. At my son's school, most parents are satisfied with actions taken by our school and appreciated their efforts for committing to teach their students every day.

On the other hand, some problems on distance learning have been pointed out by the authorities, which include losing contacts of 5-8 % of school children (due to neglect from parents, etc.)⁷and increasing education gap depending on families (families in poverty, lack of IT environment, immigration families, etc.) during the crisis. Personally, I thought this distance learning is also creating such gaps due to teacher's capacities for utilizing various IT tools.

From my observation, however, French education system has equipped a basis to start distance learning and to response to this crisis, compared to the Japanese education system.

3-3. Environment

As with other cities and towns in the world, my town suddenly became very quiet without any noise of cars, airplanes or people, especially during the first week of the lockdown. In my town, situated just next to Geneva airport of Switzerland, we saw many airplanes on the ground, not in the air. Right after economic activities halted, air became clear and environment was improved.

On the other hand, we have been witnessing a lot of garbage of masks and plastic gloves, which are a new custom in Europe, on streets. In addition, more plastics, which Europe has been tackling hard to minimize its use, have been used more in supermarkets to protect foods from the virus.



Fig. 4 Many masks on street!

3-4. Support for arts and culture

During the lockdown, I believe that many people were helped by the power of arts and cultures and people realized its importance. On 6 May, President Macron announced the support measures for arts and culture sectors. He called for a 12-month extension to France's special unemployment benefits for actors, performers, musicians and technicians, a scheme designed to protect them in the downtime between jobs, establishment of a foundation to

⁷ AFPBB: <https://www.afpbb.com/articles/-/3276399>

support films and dramas which are cancelled to shoot.⁸

3-5. Domestic violence (DV)

One of the concerns of the French government during the lockdown was increasing cases of domestic violence (DV). The reasons of DVs vary from families which had problems before the lockdown to violence which stems from the stress of this crisis. According to the French authorities, there are 30% more reports on the first week after the lockdown in Paris compared to the normal time and they showed a great concern for the increasing numbers of cases.⁹ In order to protect victims, the French government strengthened the roles of the organizations¹⁰ working for stopping DV. At the end of March 2020, the government also developed a new system to protect DV victims by designating pharmacies in making emergency calls to the police on behalf of victims when they come there and say a “code” for help.

3-6. Solidarité

Although France is famous for individualism and liberalism, I could see a lot of people trying to help each other and extending support to those vulnerable during the crisis. People used the word “Solidarité” (Solidarity) to overcome the crisis together. In my estate, we created a list of people who need supports and people who can offer support and then residents can contact each other if they need help. In addition, I could hear applause at 20:00 every day during the lockdown to show their appreciations and solidarity for essential workers.

4. Easing the lockdown

After showing a decreasing trend of the number of cases and patients in intensive care, the French government started easing the lockdown. The government is lifting restrictions step by step as follows (only the major items are listed). Continued telework arrangement is recommended if you can work from home.

4-1. Phase I (from 11 May to 1 June) ¹¹

- Lifting restrictions based on zones

France is divided into two zones (green zone and red zone) according to the suspected presence of the virus, the ability of hospitals to cope with patients in need of intensive care, and the availability of tests for people showing symptoms. As of 10 May, the regions including Paris and Strasbourg, which are in red zone, have different measure for easing confinement (Fig 5).

⁸ Bureau Consulaire du Japon à Lyon: https://www.lyon.fr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00037.html

⁹ Le Monde: https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/03/27/confinement-un-dispositif-d-alerte-dans-les-pharmacies-pour-les-femmes-violentees_6034583_3224.html

¹⁰ Arrêtons les violences: <https://arretonslesviolences.gouv.fr>

¹¹ Ambassade du Japon en France: https://www.fr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/coronavirus_00043.html

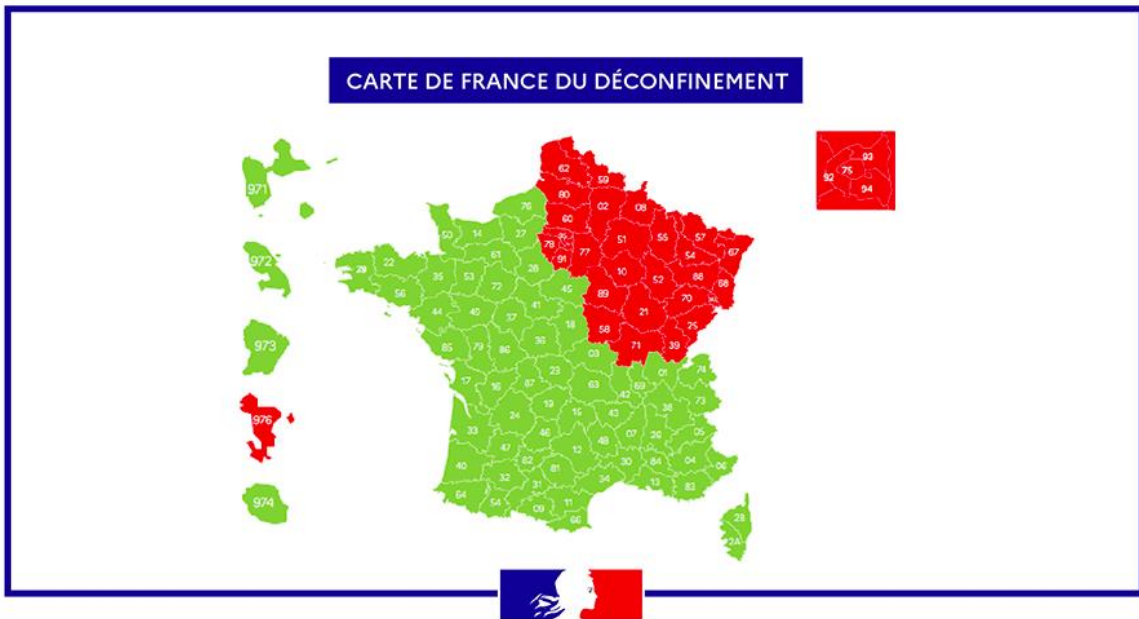


Fig.5 French map divided into two colours as of 7 May¹²

- Freedom of movement within 100km from home

You can travel 100 km from home without a form. People who want to go beyond 100 km would still need their travel authorisations and only in case of emergencies. The fine for violation is 135 euro.

- Allowing gatherings of up to 10 people
- Reopening of parks and libraries (only in green zone)
- Public transport in Paris

Public transportation in Paris returns to 75% of regular service. Those travelling at rush hour are required to supply a certificate from their employer justifying the trip.

- Wearing masks

All passengers on public transport nationwide are required to wear masks or risk a 135 euro fine.

- Gradual reopening of schools

After 11 May, kindergartens, creches, and primary schools are opening gradually. It is not a compulsory, but voluntary for each family. At first, students in Grand section, CP and CM2 are going back to school. The priority goes to students that have difficulties with distance learning and those students whose parents are essential workers. In green zones, secondary schools opened on 18 May and students have to wear masks.

- Test

After 11 May, there was enough capacity to conduct PCR test in France, and the cost of testing is covered by the national health insurance.

¹² Ministère des Solidarités et de la Santé: <https://solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/soins-et-maladies/maladies/maladies-infectieuses/coronavirus/etat-des-lieux-et-actualites/article/indicateurs-de-l-activite-epidemiologique>

4-2. Phase 2 (From 2 to 21 June) ¹³

- Île-de-France (including Paris), Mayotte et la Guyane are in orange zone, but other regions are in green zone.
- All schools across France reopen. High school also reopen partially starting from the ones in green zone.
- Café, restaurants and bars reopen. Those in orange zone is able to open only the part of outside terrace.
- All parks in France reopen. Beaches, museums, historical monuments resume the service.
- Lifting the travel within 100km
- Coordinating the border opening with neighboring countries from 15 June
- Development of the StopCovid mobile phone application¹⁴

StopCovid is designed to alert users who may have been in contact with someone infected by COVID-19. Complementary use only. Personal information and privacies are protected as it provides others anonymous user codes only, which will be saved for a certain period. No GPS function to be used. The government cannot access to the data. The app is available for free from 2 June on a voluntary basis. In case users have been within one meter of patients for at least 15 minutes, alerts will be sent to the phone.

4-3. Phase III (from 22 June)

Restrictions will be further lifted taking into account the situations.

5. Towards a New Normal

After 8-week lockdown, life style, customs, and society in France changed drastically.

French people used to think that masks are for sick people and those who work at hospitals. I had never seen people wearing masks even in the season of flu. However, as the virus started going around France, many people started wearing masks and gloves to protect themselves, especially during shopping even at the time that the government didn't recommend to wear one. In addition, many local governments have started distributing masks to residents since it became mandatory to wear masks in public transport.

We can also see some changes in culture and customs, such as “bise” and fresh “baguettes”. I don't see people making greetings with bises (kisses) anymore in public places. Also French people go and buy fresh “baguettes” every day (depending on people though), but now people don't go for bakery every day just

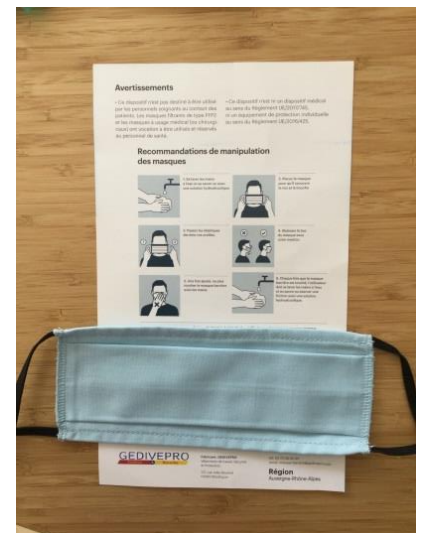


Fig. 6 Distributed mask by the local government of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes

¹³ Ambassade du Japon en France: https://www.fr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/seigensochikanwa-20200528.html

¹⁴ Le Gouvernement de la République française: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus/stopcovid>

to buy one baguette. I presume people are giving up eating fresh baguettes or buying more than one baguette to avoid going out to shop many times.

Schools started gradually, however there are many restrictions imposed in schools such as maximum 15 students in a class, breaks taken separately by each class, students going into and out of a school one by one. From now on to the end of school year at the beginning of July, it is the time for teachers and students to get used to a new normal at French school.

Furthermore, the ways of this year's *vacance* for summer look like changing. People are not trying to go far by airplanes and enjoy travelling within the country or the nearby countries.

Experiencing a new normal in France, however, I could see some moves which France is trying to take it a chance to make better society. The French government started pushing environmental issues further as it has been promoting it as one of the first policy agendas. As mentioned above, the government demanded the Air France-KLM group to strengthen their environmental measures in exchange with historic financial support to the airline company. In addition, as the Ministry of Environment announced on 30 April 2020¹⁵, along with the start of easing the restrictions, the government allocated a budget of 20 million euro for avoiding congestion of public transports used for commuting to work and school, as well as to promote the use of bicycles as an eco-friendly transportation means. The budget includes the subsidy for providing 50 euros to allocate the cost of repairing personal bicycles, the development of roads dedicated to bicycles, the development of bicycle parking lots, and the assistance of employees of companies promoting bicycle commuting and car sharing to 400 euro per person. Furthermore, the government demanded automobile industries to become the biggest clean car industry in Europe in exchange with providing 8 billion euro support.¹⁶

For the support for arts and cultural sector, the government is planning to support young artists, collaborating with schools to provide summer cultural programs for kids. There are many new ideas coming up.

Lastly, I have noticed that there are a lot of criticisms against the government's handling of COVID-19 in France as there are in other countries as well. However, as a Japanese residing in France, I believe that there are some things that Japan or the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) sector could learn from France's response to and recovery from COVID-19, such as rapid decision/policy making, government's accountability to the nation, commitment to the right to receive an education, and Build Back Better (BBB).

(As of 2 June 2020)

¹⁵ Ministère de la Transition écologique et solidaire: <https://www.ecologique-solidaire.gouv.fr/sortie-du-confinement-ministere-transition-ecologique-et-solidaire-annonce-plan-20-millions-deuros>

¹⁶ Ambassade de France à Tokyo: <https://jp.ambafrance.org/article15766>