

Tokyo Olympics To Be Held Without Fans After Japan Enters COVID-19 State of Emergency



The 2021 Tokyo Olympics will have no fans.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced Thursday that no spectators would be permitted to attend events at the upcoming Summer Games.

The announcement comes after a declaration of a new state of emergency in Japan, which takes effect Monday and runs through Aug. 22. The Tokyo Games are to begin July 23 and end Aug. 8.

“The number of infected cases in the area, including Tokyo, has been increasing since the end of last month,” Suga said. “The number of severe cases and bed occupancy rate continues to be on the low level, but considering the impact of variants, we need to enhance countermeasures so that the infection will not spread nationwide.”

Japan already banned foreign spectators in March, and Olympic organizers continued to decide whether to allow Japanese spectators. On June 21, the committee announced Japanese fans could attend at limited capacity, with venues capped at 50 percent attendance and a maximum of 10,000 fans.

The restrictions on those attendings were severe, including no cheering or chanting and no sales of alcohol. The organizers also asked fans to return home immediately after the events, fearing attendees would gather at local bars, restaurants and shops when they left the venue.

“The priority will be to determine safe and secure Games,” Tokyo 2020 president Seiko Hashimoto said at a news conference after meeting with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the Japanese government, the International Olympic Committee and International Paralympic Committee.

“We wanted a full stadium so community people could get involved in welcoming the athletes so we could have a full presentation of the power of sports,” Hashimoto said. “However, now faced with COVID-19, we have no other choice but to hold the Games in a limited way.”

According to Yoshifumi Takemoto and Ju-min Park of Reuters, government officials reported 920 new COVID-19 cases in Tokyo Wednesday, the highest daily total since May 13.

Takemoto and Park also reported that a slow vaccine rollout in Japan has resulted in only 25 percent of

the population receiving at least one shot. According to Reuters, Japanese health adviser, Shigeru Omi said it would “preferable” for the Summer Games not to have fans in attendance.

“There are many people who were looking forward to the Games, those people who purchased tickets as well as the local community, and we are very sorry we are unable to deliver on the limited Games,” Hashimoto said. “But we want to have a thorough operation to ensure safe and secure games.”

USA Today’s Nancy Armour reported the announcement is a blow for Tokyo organizers and will add to the cost of the Games for the Japanese people. During the Olympics, local organizers receive a portion of revenue from ticket sales. The organizer’s original budget was \$800 million, but this number will not be reached without fans in attendance.

“The shortfall will now have to be made up by the Japanese,” Armour reported. “The official cost of the Games is already \$15.4 billion, but it is believed to be much higher — perhaps twice as much.”

The Opening Ceremony is set for July 23 at Olympic Stadium in Tokyo and will occur with or without spectators. Twenty-six former, current and future Buckeyes will stand with their fellow Olympians at the ceremony before competing in their respective events over two weeks.