

STOPPING DISASTROUS DISEASES AT THE BORDER

KATSUMI YASUKURA

Transboundary animal diseases such as hoof-and-mouth disease and highly pathogenic avian influenza break out repeatedly overseas. Japan's Animal Quarantine Service strives to prevent such pathogens from entering the country, as well as alerting travelers to safely bring animals and meat products across the border.

As an island nation, Japan has built-in advantages in controlling epidemics. Japan has some of the world's finest quarantine systems, and has earned the top score in the animal quarantine category in the World Organization for animal health evaluation. For example, Japan has had no outbreaks of rabies since 1958, and is one of the few countries entirely free of the disease.

However, Kazuo Ito, the director general of the Animal Quarantine Service of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, raises an alarm. "We are on high alert, because there have been hoof-and-mouth disease and African swine fever outbreaks overseas, particularly in neighboring countries," he reports.

The Animal Quarantine Service has a comprehensive quarantine system designed to prevent the spread of such infectious diseases. "At the moment, no animal products are allowed in from countries that have had cases of hoof-and-mouth disease, African swine fever or avian influenza, not even as a souvenir

or for personal consumption," says Ito. "Even from safe countries, any type of meat [including ham, sausages and bacon] requires an inspection certificate issued by the government authorities of the exporting country, or the product will not be allowed into Japan. Those who fail to satisfy this requirement may be subject to punishment. In 2017, we placed twenty-nine detection dogs at major airports and international post offices and logged 43,968 cases of banned animal products."

The Animal Quarantine Service has also taken various other measures to safeguard Japan, including distributing multilingual posters and pamphlets, announcements on aircrafts, questioning people entering the country at immigration and installing sole disinfection mats at more than sixty-six major international airports and seaports. Their guidance for travelers carrying animals and animal products is available in multiple languages on their website as well as on YouTube, and is included in apps aimed at visitors to Japan. Airlines inbound from nearby regions are



- 1 There are twenty-nine dogs patrolling major Japanese airports
- 2 The Quarantine Service has installed sole disinfection mats at sixty-six major airports and ports around Japan
- 3 Posters informing travelers of prohibited items and goods, with QR codes that lead to further information
- 4 In 2017 detection dogs exposed 43,968 cases of banned animal products
- 5 Those who have acquired meat or other animal products should go to the animal quarantine counter in their country of arrival

asked to pass this information on to their passengers at departure.

The Animal Quarantine Service are also enhancing their anti-epidemic efforts through joint activities with prefectural governments. “We’re using detection dogs to conduct inspections not only on luggage but also on airmail from regions reported to have malignant animal infectious disease outbreaks. We’re also intensifying inspections on cruise ships,” he says.

However, Japan will have a huge surge in its number of visitors while hosting the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in 2020. “Along with economic globalization and changes in industrial structure, the channels and possibilities of invasion for pathogens will only increase,” Ito states. “We’re preparing to face epidemic prevention at the border even more strictly.”

Ito strongly urges visitors to consult with the animal quarantine office at major Japanese airports and seaports in advance if they want to bring animal products into Japan, are traveling with pets or were

in contact with livestock in their home country before their departure.

In particular, for rabies prevention, dogs and cats must be microchipped, have received the required vaccinations and antibody tests and obtained the proper certificate after a waiting period of at least 180 days before being allowed into Japan. This process takes at least seven months.

“If your pet fails to meet these requirements, it may be quarantined at our detention facility for up to 180 days, so please be careful,” he emphasizes.

The Animal Quarantine Service also monitors outbound travelers. “You can now buy meat products approved for export to Singapore at souvenir shops in Haneda and Chubu airports,” Ito says. “You can go through the procedure to take meat products out of Japan at the animal quarantine counter. Since it may take time to make necessary adjustments and confirm information, please contact us as soon as possible if you need assistance.” ■