Japan to declare more COVID state if emergencies

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Japan said on Friday it would declare a state of emergency in three more prefectures hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, in a surprise move reflecting growing concerns about the virus's spread.

1.With just over two months before the start of the Tokyo Olympics, Japan is expanding its state of emergency to try and contain a more infectious strain of COVID-19.

2. Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura said on Friday, three more prefectures will be given emergency declarations.

3. Those three are Hokkaido, Okayama and Hiroshima, which will on Sunday join Tokyo, Osaka and four other prefectures, and last until the end of May.

4. The restrictions include eateries closing by 8pm, as well as a ban on alcohol at bars and restaurants.

5. The expanded list of areas under a state of emergency will cover about 70% of Japan’s population.

6. Meanwhile, public opposition -- including from some doctors and athletes -- has been growing.

7. A petition to cancel the games was submitted to organizers on Friday.

8. That petition on change.org has received more than 350,000 signatures in just nine days - a record pace for the forum’s Japanese version, according to the campaign's organizer.

9. Dozens of towns due to host visiting athletes at pre-Games events have also cancelled those plans.

10. They said they cannot guarantee medical help, as experts say medical resources are now being pushed to the brink.

11. Japan’s vaccination drive has been the slowest among advanced nations with just 3 percent of the population vaccinated, according to Reuters data.

12. Japan has seen more than 650,000 confirmed cases so far.