



Letter to the Editor

COVID-19 testing of pregnant women in Japan

Dear Editor,

Umazume *et al.*¹ conducted the first nationwide survey on the use of personal protective equipment during labor and delivery, and coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) testing of pregnant women in Japan, and reported that 9–17% of pregnant women in Japan underwent prenatal screening. Although universal severe acute respiratory syndrome 2 (SARS-CoV-2) screening of pregnant women is recommended in high-prevalence areas (e.g. New York),^{2,3} the value of prenatal screening in low-prevalence areas is unclear.

In Fukui, a low-prevalence area of Japan, we conducted voluntary SARS-CoV-2 PCR screening of pregnant women based on the individual's level of concern about COVID-19. The test was performed 2 weeks before the expected delivery date using a nasopharyngeal sample. Written informed consent was obtained from the women. From April 24 to July 25, 2020, 805 pregnant women underwent SARS-CoV-2 PCR testing before delivery (54% of all deliveries in this area). Fukui had SARS-CoV-2 prevalence of 16.5 per 100 000 population during this period. Of the 805 pregnant women tested, 15 had mild symptoms and 790 had no symptoms. None of them tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 and there were no false-negative results based on the lack of case notifications of COVID-19 in pregnant women and women who had recently given birth in Fukui during the study period.

The result suggests that universal screening of pregnant women may not be necessary and should not be mandatory in low-prevalence areas of COVID-19. We consider that in low prevalence areas, it might be reasonable to conduct selective testing of pregnant women at high risk, such as those with: (i) any symptoms; (ii) a history of close contact with someone with COVID-19; or (iii) recent travel/arrival from a high-prevalence area and (iv) those who are anxious about the possibility of having COVID-19. It is also necessary to be prepared to implement universal screening of pregnant women at any time if there is an increase in the local incidence of SARS-CoV-2 infection.

The regional COVID-19 epidemic situation varies depending on population density, travel patterns and the timelines for public health interventions and varies from country to country, by region within a country and over time. As Umazume *et al.* state in their report,¹ appropriate guidelines for COVID-19 testing of pregnant women prior to delivery are needed in Japan.

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Disclosure

None declared.

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References

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