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The establishment of the Japan Institute for Health Security (JIHS): A new era in infectious disease response and research

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Abstract: On April 1, 2025, the National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM) and the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID) will be merged to establish the Japan Institute for Health Security (JIHS). This merger strengthens Japan's capacity to address infectious diseases and health threats, aiming for a resilient and secure society. This paper highlights the establishment of JIHS, its alignment with government reforms, and its strategic priorities for the future. The initiative originated on October 6, 2020, when the Liberal Democratic Party's Policy Research Council proposed measures to address vulnerabilities exposed by COVID-19. In 2022, the Japanese government called for formulating a central control tower, the Cabinet Agency for Infectious Disease Crisis Management (CAICM), upgrading the divisions related to infectious diseases to the Department of Infectious Disease Prevention and Control in the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), and establishing the JIHS. JIHS will serve as a scientific advisory body during infectious disease crises, guiding the Prime Minister and the MHLW. It focuses on four key areas: *i*) Disease intelligence: risk assessment and data analysis; *ii*) Research, development, and innovation: advancing medical science; *iii*) Comprehensive medical services: strengthening clinical response capacity; and *iv*) Human resource development and international cooperation: building expertise and partnerships. Through integration, JIHS aims to improve existing systems and create synergy between basic and clinical research. As a hub for domestic and international collaboration, JIHS will consolidate critical information, catalyze innovative research, and deliver transformative solutions to address domestic and global infectious disease challenges.

***Keywords*:** JIHS, health security, infectious disease control, Japan

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a reassessment of governmental frameworks worldwide, leading to significant organizational reforms to improve crisis response preparedness and capabilities for future pandemics (*1*). In Japan, these reforms encompassed restructuring the frameworks for planning and implementing policies to respond effectively to emerging health threats (*2*). Among these initiatives, the Japanese government resolved to establish a new research institute, subsequently named the *Kokuritsu Kenko Kikikanri Kenkyu Kikou* (国立健康危機管理研究機構) in Japanese and the Japan Institute for Health Security (JIHS) in English (*3*). This institute will be formed through the merger of the National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM) and the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID) and will officially commence operations on April 1, 2025.

The establishment of JIHS aims to strengthen Japan's capabilities as a center of excellence for infectious disease control (*2*). It is envisioned as a hub for providing scientific insights, evaluating epidemic trends, advancing clinical research and trials, and supporting rapid development of medical countermeasures such as diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. Its creation acknowledges the need for an organization capable of informing governmental decision-making and addressing health crises with agility and innovation. This paper examines the background leading to establishment of JIHS, outlining its goals, organizational structure, and future priorities.

Reforming the new structure of the government architecture after reflecting on the COVID-19 response

The origins of reforming the new structures initiative can be traced back to October 6, 2020, when a subcommittee of the Liberal Democratic Party's Policy Research

Council proposed measures to address vulnerabilities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic (*4*). Subsequently, on June 15, 2022, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced plans for a new institute by integrating NCGM and NIID to establish a so-called "Japan CDC" under the Minister of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW) (*5*).

On September 2, 2022, the government's COVID-19 Response Headquarters, which Prime Minister Fumio Kishida chaired, unveiled the "Specific Measures to Prepare for the Next Infectious Disease Crisis" (*6,7*). This plan explicitly outlined the establishment of a control tower, the Cabinet Agency for Infectious Disease Crisis Management (CAICM), to centralize the planning and formulation of government policies while coordinating efforts among relevant ministries and agencies for infectious disease crisis responses directed by the Prime Minister (*8*). It also included upgrading the divisions related to infectious diseases to the Department of Infectious Disease Prevention and Control within the Health Service Bureau in MHLW (*9*). The department conducts integrated activities such as analyzing and understanding the characteristics of infectious diseases, testing, vaccinations, support for public health centres, risk communication and quarantine measures and leads the coordination of infectious disease crises. Both organizations were established on 1st September 2023. Figure 1 shows the Government Organizational Framework for Infectious Disease Crisis Response in Japan as of 4th Sep 2023 (*9*). To strengthen the collaboration between the two agencies, under the Chief Medical and Global Health Officer in MHLW, who also serves as the Cabinet Infectious Disease Crisis Management Officer in CAICM, the Department of Infectious Disease Prevention and Control will collaborate closely with the CAICM.

Simultaneously, a new expert organization called JIHS focused on infectious diseases was announced (*6*). JIHS will provide scientific insights to the Prime Minister (*via* the CAICM) and the MHLW (*via* the Infectious Disease Control Department). Its key functions will include infectious disease intelligence activity, research and development, comprehensive medical services and human resource development and international cooperations.

Brief history and core functions of NCGM

NCGM traces its origins to the Army Temporary Hospital, established in 1868 and was renamed the Army Center Hospital in 1873 (Table 1) (*10*). In 1929, it moved to its current location in Toyama, Shinjuku, Tokyo. After World War II, it was transferred to the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 1945 and renamed the National Tokyo Daiichi Hospital. The institute has continuously evolved to meet changing demands of the times and implement key government policies. In 1974, it became the National Medical Center Hospital. Over the years, it expanded its scope, establishing the AIDS Medical Information Center in 1988 and founding the International Medical Center of Japan in 1993. In 2010, it was restructured as the National Research and Development Agency, NCGM.

NCGM includes the Center Hospital in Shinjuku, which has 749 beds, including a special infection care

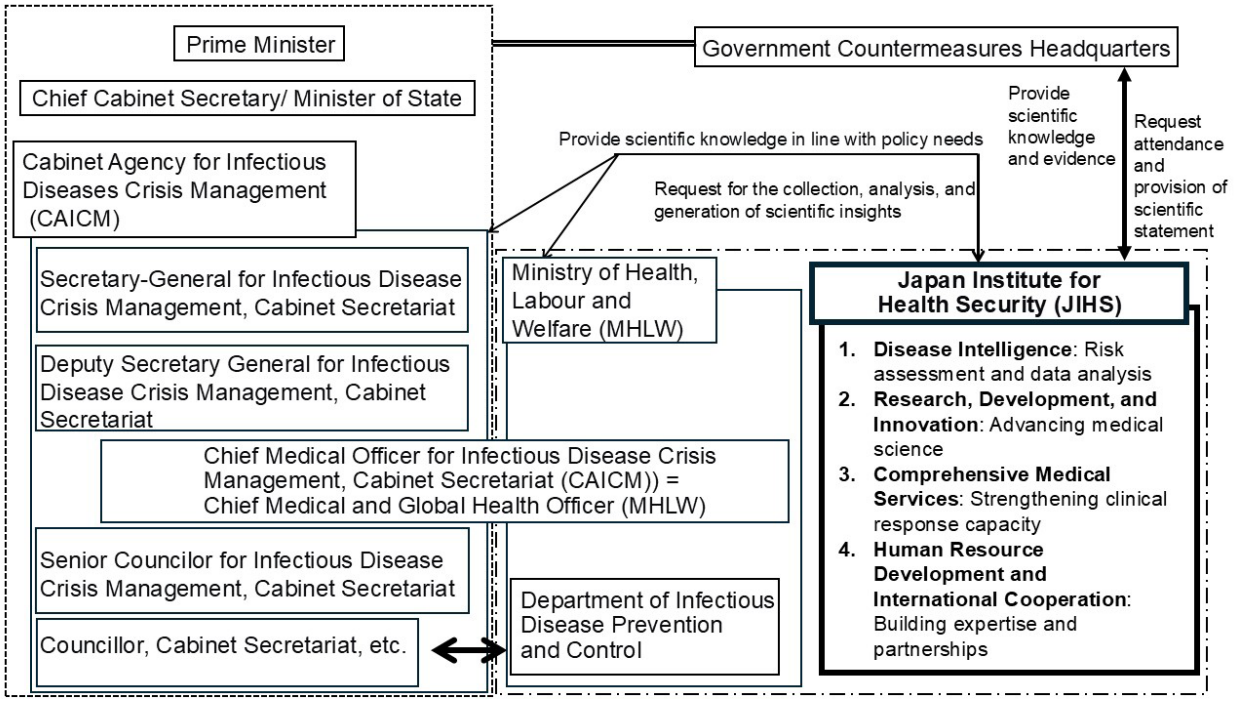

Figure 1. Government organizational framework for infectious disease crisis response in Japan.

unit (4 beds), and provides advanced and specialized medical care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, NCGM led efforts to care for infected patients from early 2020, contributed to developing clinical guidelines, and provided technical input for public health policies for the MHLW, and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government.

NCGM comprises several centers, including the AIDS Research Center (ACC), Disease Control and Prevention Center (DCC), Emergency Medical Care Center, Kohnodai Hospital, Research Institutes for Hepatitis and Immunology, Diabetes Research Center, and the Center for Clinical Sciences (CCS), as well as the Bureau of International Health Cooperation and the National College of Nursing. NCGM is also a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Center for: *i*) Health Systems Development, *ii*) Prevention, Preparedness, and Response to Emerging Infectious Diseases, and *iii*) Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Antimicrobial Resistance.

Brief history and core functions of NIID

In 1947, the National Institute of Health (NIH) was founded as a research institute affiliated with the Ministry of Health and Welfare, Japan for conducting: *i*) fundamental and applied research on infectious diseases, which are recognized as a high priority for establishing a safe and secure society after World War II, and *ii*) national test for lot release and development of antibiotics and vaccines. NIH initially included three departments (research department, quality control department, and pilot production section) (Table 2) (*11*). The institute established the Murayama Branch Laboratories in 1961 to cope with the large-scale poliomyelitis epidemic in 1958.

This institute transferred the main functions of the present site, Toyama Research Laboratories, located in Shinjuku, Tokyo, right next to the NCGM in 1992. Then, in April 1997, the NIH was renamed the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID) and opened the Infectious Disease Surveillance Center to collect all the information on incidents of infectious diseases. The NIID opened additional functions, such as the Influenza Virus Research Center in 2009, the Designation of a Biosafety level (BSL)-4 facility at Murayama Branch in 2015, and the AMR Research Center in 2017. During the COVID-19 pandemic, an increased number of research staff have been allocated to strengthen public health response capacity, with the establishment of the Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response (CEPR) in 2020 and the Center for Field Epidemic Intelligence, research, and professional development (CFEIR) in 2021. Furthermore, the Research Center for Drug and Vaccine Development and the Research Planning and Coordination Center were established to promote research, development, and collaboration.

Table 1. Brief History of National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM)

Year	Event
1868	Opened as an Army Temporary Hospital
1873	Renamed the Army Center Hospital
1929	Relocated to the current site in Toyama, Shinjuku, Tokyo
1945	Transferred to the Ministry of Health and Welfare as the National Tokyo Daiichi Hospital
1947	Opened a subsidiary nursing school
1974	Renamed the National Medical Center Hospital
1988	Established the AIDS Medical Information Center
1993	Founded International Medical Center of Japan
2001	Opened the National College of Nursing
2003	Designated a medical institution for specified infectious diseases
2010	Reorganized as an Independent administrative agency, the National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM)
2015	Renamed as a National Research and Development Agency, NCGM

Table 2. Brief History of National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID)

Year	Event
1947	Established as the National Institute of Health (NIH)
1961	Established labs for quality control of polio vaccines in Musashimurayama, Tokyo
1988	Established the AIDS Research Center
1992	Relocated to the current site in Toyama, Shinjuku, Tokyo
1997	Renamed to the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID)
	Affiliated Leprosy Research Center
	Established Infectious Disease Surveillance Center
2009	Established Influenza Virus Research Center
2015	Designated as BSL-4 facility at Murayama Branch
2017	Established AMR Research Center
2020	Established Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response (CEPR)
2021	Established Center for Field Epidemic Intelligence, Research and Professional Development (CFEIR)

NIID has been nominated as 4 WHO Collaborating Centers for virus reference and research (enterovirus), reference and research on influenza, standardization and evaluation of biologicals, and AMR surveillance and research. NIID is also a reference laboratory for Japanese Encephalitis Global specialized laboratory, Polio Global Specialized Laboratory, Polio Regional Reference Laboratory, National Polio Laboratory, measles and Rubella Global Specialized Laboratory, Measles and Rubella Regional Reference Laboratory, Human Papillomavirus Laboratory Network Western Pacific Regional reference laboratory, H5 Influenza reference laboratory, Essential regulatory laboratory, WHO Coronavirus network reference laboratory, and WHO global surveillance of drug resistance in leprosy.

The institute traces its origins to the Institute for Infectious Disease, established in 1892 by Dr. Shibasaburo Kitasato as a private research institute affiliated with the Hygiene Society of Japan (*11*). It later came under the supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs, facilitating its transformation into the Imperial Institute of Infectious Disease. Subsequently, it was transferred to the Ministry of Education and integrated into Tokyo Imperial University as the Institute for Infectious Disease in 1914 up to 1946.

Goals and priorities of JIHS

Mission

The mission of the JIHS is to contribute to building a resilient and secure society through the implementation of research and development (R&D) on infectious diseases and other diseases, as well as the provision of medical care.

Vision

The vision of the JIHS is to become an "Integrated Science Center for Infectious Diseases" in Japan that leads the world in infectious diseases countermeasures, with world-class capabilities in information collection, analysis and risk assessment, research and development, and clinical functions. JIHS will prioritize the following four core pillars:

i) *Disease intelligence: information collection, analysis and risk assessment*

JIHS will be a central hub for infectious disease intelligence, conducting data collection, analysis and assessment while fostering collaboration with domestic and international partners. The institute will deliver scientific insights to inform government decision-making and also provide the public with clear, accessible information.

ii) *Research, development, and innovation*

JIHS aims to establish itself as a global leader in research by creating a world-class environment for advancing scientific discovery. Its efforts will span from foundational research and the development of medical countermeasures to clinical trials. JIHS will act swiftly as a research and development hub during infectious disease crises, leveraging a robust domestic and international network to coordinate efforts, including clinical trials.

Figure 2. Logo of Japan Institute for Health Security.

iii) *Comprehensive medical services*

Advanced clinical capabilities are crucial for addressing infectious disease crises. JIHS will build upon and enhance NCGM's general hospital functions to safeguard public health and provide top-tier medical care. During surges of patients during a pandemic or infectious disease crisis, NCGM will shift to treating moderate and severe cases of infected patients and coordinate a local and regional network that stratifies multiple hospitals by function to ensure adequate medical service capacity.

iv) *Human resource development and international cooperation*

JIHS will focus on cultivating and retaining experts across various disciplines, including healthcare professionals, researchers, and public health responders. This will be achieved through international exchanges and partnerships among industry, government, and academia. Additionally, JIHS will promote global health initiatives through active international cooperation.

On this occasion of the JIHS establishment, the new logo was created. It embodies the unification of organizations: the NIID and NCGM (Figure 2). The outer circle represents a culture dish, symbolizing NIID's scientific research and the Earth, reflecting NCGM's global health mission. The inner red circle evokes Japan's national flag, signifying JIHS's role as a national institution. The crossed lines symbolize the merger, representing our commitment and aspiration to advance infection control measures as a unified entity.

Organizational structure of JIHS

The organizational structure of JIHS will be divided into the control bureau and the organization. The control bureau will establish five new bureaus on 1st April 2025: *i*) Health Security and Management (General Coordination), *ii*) Research and Development, *iii*) Medical Services, *iv*) Human Resource Development, and *v*) System Infrastructure Development. JIHS organization will comprise the following institutions: *i*) National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID), *ii*) National Institute of Global Health and Medicine (currently the Research Institute, NCGM), *iii*) National

Center for Global Health and Medicine (currently Center Hospital), *iv*) National Kohnodai Medical Center (currently Kohnodai Hospital), *v*) Center for Clinical Sciences, *vi*) Bureau of Global Health Cooperation (currently the Bureau of International Health Cooperation), and *vii*) National College of Nursing.

The JIHS will be the center of excellence for infectious disease control domestically and internationally. Through integration, JIHS aims to enhance existing systems while fostering synergy between basic and clinical research. JIHS will strengthen the hospital's ability to respond to the crisis and maintain the function of providing advanced medical service as the hospital. By acting as a hub for domestic and international networks for infectious diseases, the institute will consolidate critical information, drive innovative research, and generate transformative solutions for health security.

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