

Preventive Measures for and Utilization of Parks Based on Preventive Measures Against COVID-19

(Research period: FY2021-FY2022)

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1. Introduction

While COVID-19 is not yet settled, parks and other public spaces require measures to prevent its spread, as well as utilization corresponding to the new normal.

“The Use of Parks Corresponding to the New Normal,” published by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) on August 7, 2020, summarizes basic points regarding park use, while taking into account secondary health damage from the COVID pandemic due to long-term restrictions on activities and lack of exercise because of measures against the infectious disease. It further notes the need to make determinations on specific use according to the situation in each location and to check cautions and other information from park administrators, and points to the possibility of successive reviews as knowledge accumulates and the infection situation changes in the future.

Amid these circumstances, the National Institute for Land and Infrastructure Management (NILIM) seeks to record infection preventive measures from a long-term perspective and to organize technical notes for park administrators that summarize key points and matters to note based on infection preventive measures regarding the planning, design, management, and operation of city parks and their utilization corresponding to the new normal, with the aim of contributing to effectively promoting projects in the future.

Below, we present the contents of research we have conducted from FY2021 to FY2022.

2. Questionnaire surveys on responses in city parks

In order to gain information on the realities of responding according to the conditions of the spread of infection in January and February 2022 (under a state-of-emergency declaration, during priority measures to prevent the spread of the disease, when these are lifted, etc.),

Table 1. Period covered by questionnaire surveys

Period	Period A	Period B	Period C
Dates	Period of 1st state-of-emergency declaration •Nationwide (Apr. 16–May 14, 2020) •Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa (Apr. 7–May 25, 2020)	Infection expansion period (Jun.–Oct. 2021)	Response date (Jan. 2022)
State of infection and measures	Period when the first state-of-emergency declaration was issued across the nation with the first wave and infection preventive measures were implemented amid a dearth of knowledge about measures against infectious disease.	Period when infection preventive measures were implemented based on the experiences from the first state-of-emergency declaration, amid the spread of infection and the issuance of state-of-emergency declarations and priority measures to prevent the spread of the disease in various regions. On August 7, 2021, the Parks, Green Spaces and Landscape Division, MLIT published key points for park use, etc., based on the “new normal”	As of January 2022, when infections decreased with the progress of vaccinations, long-term state-of-emergency declarations and priority measures to prevent the spread of the disease were lifted, and infections temporarily abated, but concerns of expanding infections arose because of the prevalence of the Omicron variant (response date: January 2022)

Table 2. Implementation of measures relating to prevention of infectious disease (by period and by park type (all periods); multiple answers allowed)

Implemented measures	Period A		Period B		Period C		Paid-entry parks (any type)		Parks in cities* Large-sized parks n=87		Parks in residential districts n=72		Green buffer spaces, etc. (excluding Special parks) n=74		Special parks n=69	
	(1) Fully closed	27	64%	17	40%	3	7%	27	64%	18	21%	4	6%	2	3%	7
(2) Partially closed	26	62%	20	48%	8	19%	27	64%	68	78%	37	51%	26	35%	29	42%
(3) Call for caution	32	76%	38	90%	38	90%	42	100%	87	100%	66	92%	52	70%	57	83%
(4) Open with restricted use ((5)–(8))	14	33%	22	52%	11	26%	29	69%	56	64%	33	46%	20	27%	20	29%
(5) Restricted numbers	10	24%	19	45%	12	29%	21	50%	37	43%	13	18%	10	14%	11	16%
(6) Restricted times	5	12%	13	31%	5	12%	14	33%	36	41%	17	24%	8	11%	10	14%
(7) Limits on usage methods	6	14%	7	17%	7	17%	13	31%	24	28%	15	21%	10	14%	8	12%
(8) Other	7	17%	6	14%	5	12%	12	29%	31	36%	19	26%	11	15%	14	20%

we conducted questionnaire surveys to departments in charge of parks in local government (47 prefectures, 20 ordinance-designated cities, 62 core cities) using an Excel response sheet and attained a recovery rate of 74% (96 local governments). In creating the questionnaire, we set survey periods as shown in table 1 to investigate changes over time.

Excerpts from the survey results are shown below. In the questions in (1) and (2), “implemented” means that measures were used in at least one of all the parks managed by that local government.

(1) Implementation of measures relating to prevention of infectious disease (by period)

The proportion of both full and partial closures decreases as we move from period A to period C, and we inferred the reason as follows. Because period B contained the point approximately one year from the origin of the infectious disease, local governments opened parks with restrictions on use, and they shifted towards merely calling for caution in period C. The reason that calling for caution increased from period A to period B but remained steady in periods B and C is inferred to be that the contents of the calls for caution were

mostly fixed. (table 2)

(2) Implementation of measures relating to prevention of infectious disease (by park type)

The majority of parks that were closed were paid-entry parks, which are thought to allow closure by locking entry gates, etc., at 64%, followed by parks in cities and large-sized parks at 21%.

For partial closures, parks in cities and large-sized parks accounted for the majority at 78%. (table 2)

3. Preventive measures against infection in city parks and future utilization of city parks

From the results of the above-mentioned questionnaire survey conducted in FY2021 and other sources, we extracted specific cases of preventive measures against infection in city parks during the COVID pandemic and future utilization of city parks and conducted interview surveys. Cases excerpted from the results of these surveys are presented below.

(1) Specific cases of the preventive measures against infection in city parks

To respond to cherry blossom-viewing, an event characteristic of city parks, preventive measures were put in place from the beginning because many people gather and the event is accompanied by eating, drinking and parties.

Photo 1 shows the case of Ueno Park in Tokyo. When the flowers were in bloom in 2020 to 2022, planted areas were closed off to restrict parties. In addition, Sakura-dōri was closed during the 2020 flowering season and was opened during the 2021 season, but it was limited to one-way traffic, the measure was also implemented in the 2022 season.

(2) Specific case of the future utilization of city parks

Forms of future utilization responding to the new normal that were seen in city parks include use of parks as a venue for remote work, introduction of cashless transactions to avoid the Three C's and increase park user convenience (photo 2), online transmission of event programs and park information, utilization of grassed plazas for day camps, etc., drive-in theaters and other public viewing events using parking lots, etc., holding indoor programs, etc. outdoors, and adding or expanding dining offerings located outdoors (food trucks, takeout, etc.).



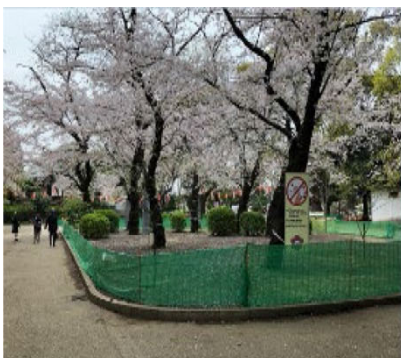
Photo 2. Cashless transaction for entry fees (Showa Kinen Park)

4. Conclusion

From the results of this research, we intend to organize technical notes for park administrators that summarize key points and matters to note regarding the planning, design, management, and operation of city parks and their future utilization, with the aim of contributing to effectively promoting projects in the future.

☞ See here for detailed information

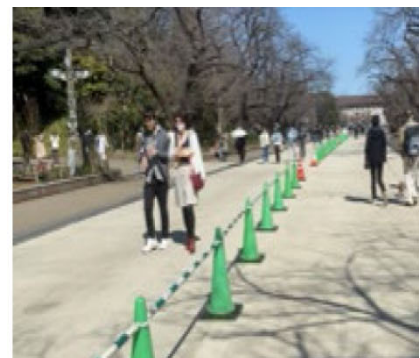
1) Tech. Note of NILIM, No.1230, pp.27-32
<http://www.nilim.go.jp/lab/bcg/siryuu/tnn/tnn1230.htm>



2020-2022: Planted areas closed to restrict parties



2020: Sakura-dōri closed



2021-2022: Sakura-dōri limited to one-way traffic

Photo 1. Trends in preventive measures during cherry blossom-viewing (photo provided by Tokyo Metropolitan Government)