

Heavy rain hits scenic central Japan, more damage in south

July 9 2020, by Mari Yamaguchi



A landslide is seen near an exit of a highway in Kyoto, western Japan Thursday, July 9, 2020. Pounding rain spread to central Japan and triggered mudslides. (Kyodo News via AP)

Flooding and mudslides have stranded hundreds of people in scenic hot

springs and hiking areas in central Japan, while rescue workers searched on Thursday for more people missing in the disaster that already has killed nearly 60 people in a southern region.

Parts of Nagano and Gifu, including areas known for scenic mountain trails and [hot springs](#), have been flooded by massive downpours.

More than 300 people, including hotel employees and visitors, were trapped in Kamikochi, as floods and mudslides hit a main road connecting the town to Matsumoto, another tourist destination in Nagano. All of the stranded people were safe, prefectural officials said.

In neighboring Gifu, hundreds were also isolated in the hot spring towns of Gero and Ontake.

As of Thursday morning, the [death toll](#) from the [heavy rains](#) which started over the weekend had risen to 59, most of them from hardest-hit Kumamoto prefecture on Japan's third largest island of Kyushu. Searching continued for a dozen still missing in Kumamoto and several others elsewhere on the island.

In Oita prefecture, a family of four running an inn in the famous hot spring town of Yufuin was missing.

Floodwaters also ravaged local vegetables and fish almost ready for shipment to consumers. An eel culturing farm in Kagoshima was hit by rains just before Japan's "unagi" season later this month. "I can't ship them, or even go near the place to feed them or change the water," eel grower Kazuya Kusuda told TBS television.



A man tries to shovel mud out from a building affected by a heavy rain in Hitoyoshi, Kumamoto prefecture, southern Japan Thursday, July 9, 2020. Pounding rain spread to central Japan and triggered mudslides. (Kyodo News via AP)



A parking lot is filled with earth and sand following a heavy rain in Gero, Gifu prefecture, central Japan Thursday, July 9, 2020. Pounding rain spread to central Japan and triggered mudslides. (Kyodo News via AP)



People work for recovery efforts as the city was affected by a heavy rain in Hitoyoshi, Kumamoto prefecture, southern Japan Thursday, July 9, 2020. Pounding rain spread to central Japan and triggered mudslides. (Kenzaburo Fukuhara/Kyodo News via AP)



People stand near a road damaged by a heavy rain in Hita, Oita prefecture, southern Japan Wednesday, July 9, 2020. Pounding rain that already caused deadly floods in southern Japan was moving northeast Wednesday, battering large areas of Japan's main island, swelling more rivers, triggering mudslides and destroying houses and roads. (Kyodo News via AP)



A resident cleans earth and sand slid into the front of a house following a heavy rain in Gero, Gifu prefecture, central Japan Thursday, July 9, 2020. Flooding and mudslides have stranded hundreds of people in scenic hot springs and hiking areas in central Japan, while rescue workers searched on Thursday for more people missing in the disaster. (Kyodo News via AP)

In the Kurume city of Fukuoka, farmer Masatoshi Inayosi said his mustard spinach, almost ready for harvest, was destroyed by the floods.

The disaster is a further blow to the local economy already hit by the coronavirus measures, just as Japan was returning to business as usual.

Kumamoto on Thursday started accepting dozens of volunteers to help residents clean their homes, but they could only be from within the

prefecture and temperature checks and masks were required due to the coronavirus concerns.

Hundreds of thousands of people were in areas under evacuation advisories, but leaving wasn't mandatory and the number who sought shelter was not known.

Japan is at high risk of heavy rain in [early summer](#) when wet and warm air from the East China Sea flows into a seasonal rain front above the country. In July 2018, more than 200 people, about half of them in Hiroshima, died from heavy rain and flooding in southwestern Japan.

Meteorological Agency officials said the seasonal rain front has stayed above Japan longer than usual, prompting heavy [rain](#) to persist.

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