

Japan's symbol of year nods to no-lockdown virus strategy

December 14 2020

A written character that evokes everything people in Japan were urged to avoid this year—crowds, confined spaces and close contact with others—was on Monday voted the country's top linguistic symbol of 2020.

Although new infections have recently hit record highs, Japan has seen a relatively small coronavirus outbreak overall and never imposed a strict lockdown like those seen elsewhere in the world.

Instead, residents were strongly advised to use their own judgement and steer clear of situations described as "mitsu"—meaning dense, crowded and close—to limit the spread of the respiratory disease.

The social distancing message quickly gained a tongue-in-cheek popularity, with the Tokyo governor's call inspiring viral manga strips, techno remixes and even a [video game](#).

Now "mitsu" has been chosen as the character of the year in an annual public ballot organised by the Japan Kanji Aptitude Testing Foundation. It took around 14 percent of over 208,000 votes.

Japanese TV stations broadcast the announcement live, as Seihan Mori, master of the ancient Kiyomizu temple in Kyoto, painted the character on a big white panel with an ink-soaked calligraphy brush.

"After the government asked the public to avoid crowded, poorly

ventilated spaces, and places that carry the risk of close contact with strangers... many began acting with 'mitsu' always in mind," the organisation said.

Other contenders in the top 10 for 2020's character, or kanji, were mostly coronavirus-related, such as illness, harm, perish and germs.

Last year's top [character](#) was "rei", used in the word "Reiwa", the name of the new imperial era.

© 2020 AFP

Citation: Japan's symbol of year nods to no-lockdown virus strategy (2020, December 14)
retrieved 13 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-12-japan-year-no-lockdown-virus-strategy.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.