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Vaccines have played a major role in protecting people from infectious diseases. Vaccines contribute to suppress the incidence of infectious diseases and prevent people from severe diseases after infection. It must be noted to understand that it is usually difficult to recognize the effectiveness of vaccines without epidemiological studies and analyses. In addition, vaccines are effective means of preventing pandemic influenza and emerging/ re-emerging infectious diseases, which means vaccines are important in a view of national crisis management.

The government took a cautious stance in the context of health hazards caused by side effects of vaccinations and such conservative approach has delayed R&D activities to cause “vaccine gap” in Japan. Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare announced “a basic plan for vaccination (national immunization plan)” in 2014 in which mid- and long-term vision is indicated in order to promote comprehensive and systematic policies for immunization. In this plan, it is requested that immunization policy must be created based upon scientific grounds with the recognition of the basic principle “vaccine preventive diseases should be prevented by vaccination”. The national immunization plan describes that vaccines with marketing authorization are evaluated and reviewed for routine vaccination and it is expected to develop novel vaccines to combat infectious diseases with high expectation in light of medical needs and disease burden. In order to put such novel vaccines into practical use, innovative technologies and big investments are required for the development. Therefore, it is expected that Japan takes the initiative in developing novel vaccines with industry-academia-government cooperation.