

Japanese women still longest-lived

Kyodo News

The average life span of Japanese women in 2006 was the longest in the world at 85.81 years, maintaining the top spot for the 22nd consecutive year, according to data released Thursday by the health ministry.

The life expectancy of Japanese men came to 79.00 years on average in 2006, rising back to second position in the world from fourth spot in 2005, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare said.

In 2005, both men and women had posted a year-on-year fall reflecting an upsurge in flu-related deaths, but their respective life spans improved again in 2006, the ministry said.

The ministry also attributed the 2006 numbers to improvements in treatment results for cancer, heart disease and stroke.

"The average life span is expected to remain on an upward trend for years to come," a ministry official said.

The data are based on the ministry's annual "abridged life tables" that show how long a population at each specific age is expected to live, assuming that death-related conditions will remain unchanged.

In 2006, the average life expectancy grew 0.29 year for women and 0.44 year for men from 2005 levels. The gap between men and women shrank by 0.15 year to 6.81 years.

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Hong Kong followed Japan with a life expectancy of 84.6 years for women, with Spain and Switzerland next, at 83.9 years.

As for men, Icelandic males have the longest average life span, of 79.4 years, with Hong Kong men in third place at 78.8 years. Data for Iceland are for 2006, while those for Hong Kong, Spain and Switzerland are for 2005.

In its projections of the life expectancy of Japanese born in 2006, the ministry forecasts that 70.3 percent of men and 85.5 percent of women will live until age 75, while 20.6 percent of men and 43.9 percent of women will live to age 90.

The Japan Times: Friday, July 27, 2007
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