

Minamata Disease Municipal Museum

We are conveying the lessons of Minamata disease to the world.

The aim of the Minamata Disease Municipal Museum is collecting and preserving valuable materials about Minamata disease, which is considered as one of the earliest pollution problems in Japan, and handing down the lessons and experiences of Minamata disease to future generations so they do not fade away. In order to prevent the reoccurrence of disastrous pollution like Minamata disease, through displays and storytellers, we exhibit and tell the history and present situation of Minamata disease and the hard situations that patients experienced, such as the suffering and discrimination.

Since its opening in January 1993, 700,000 people from within Japan and from over 175 foreign countries have visited us to learn about pollution, the environment and human rights.

Opening Hours:

Tuesday - Sunday 9:00am - 5:00pm

*Entrance is closed 30 minutes before closing time.

Closed:

Monday (Except Holiday Mondays)

Tuesday, when Holiday Mondays

December 29 - January 3

Admission & parking free

Parking:

Space available for 15 buses and 272 cars

*There is disabled persons' parking space.

Address:

53 Myojin-Cho, Minamata City,
Kumamoto Prefecture. #867-0055

TEL: 0966-62-2621 FAX: 0966-62-2271

URL: <http://www.minamata195651.jp/>



Museum tour: 30 - 60minutes

*Please book for a group visit in advance.

Talks by storytellers: 60min.

Narratives of Minamata disease experiences
by storytellers

*Appointment necessary

*Free for groups of over 10 people

Access

By car

• Minami-Kyushu Expressway : 30minutes from Ashikita-IC

• Kyushu Expressway : 70minutes from Kurino-IC

120minutes from Kumamoto-IC

• Route 3 : 20minutes from Izumi-City, Kagoshima-Prefecture.

By train

• JR Kyushu's bullet express : 65 minutes from Hakata Station:

26minutes from Kumamoto Station

33minutes from Kagoshima-Chuo Station

*From nearest station

• Shin-Minamata Station for JR Kyushu bullet express:

15minutes by car (6.3km)

• Minamata Station for Hisatsu Orange Railway:

7minutes by car (2.5km)

MINAMATA MEMORIAL

It is a place to pray for victims of Minamata disease, to convey the misery of pollution and the preciousness of life to future generations, and to pledge to prevent tragedy such as Minamata disease from happening again. It is located on the Museum's property.



Minamata disease is a disease caused by pollution, which caused methyl mercury poisoning among people who consumed seafood contaminated by methyl mercury in industrial wastewater discharged to the Shiranui Sea by Chisso Minamata Factory.

In 1956, the occurrence of a disease of unknown cause was reported in Minamata City. However, even after the factory's industrial wastewater had been suspected as the cause, wastewater continued to be discharged. As the result, the victims of Minamata disease were discovered widely in areas along the Shiranui Sea. It was when the Japanese economy was expanding rapidly. The sea in Minamata was so abundant in fishery resources that people called it "the sea that fish gush out". People used to live a peaceful life with such bounties of the sea, but they were suddenly struck by a disease of unknown cause and died off without receiving satisfactory treatment. The bereaved families who lost their breadwinners and fishermen became desperately poor. Further, the tragedy of fetal Minamata disease patients, who were born infected with mercury in the womb, were found.

At first, since Minamata disease was mistaken for a strange infectious disease, the patients were discriminated against in many ways. For example, they were told by people around them, who feared the disease, "Don't walk in the village, or you will spread the disease." In Minamata, which was called "Chisso's castletown", there were more than a few people who defended Chisso and shunned the patients. In addition, Minamata City did not fulfill its role even though they knew the patients' sufferings, despite that the patients were also citizens. The patients and the other citizens confronted each other, thus, Minamata City plunged into chaos and the ties between people were broken. Further, since Minamata disease was mistaken as an epidemic or contagious disease, the patients could not find work and could not marry, and farm products with the name of Minamata on it could not sell. There was a tendency in many places in Japan to avoid things related to Minamata.

In 1968, the industrial wastewater from Chisso Minamata Factory finally stopped being discharged. It had been 12 years since Minamata disease was recognized. In that year, the government recognized at last that Minamata disease was a pollution-caused disease caused by Chisso Minamata Factory.

The victims whose health were ruined and the victims' families who lost their dearly loved family members started lawsuits and negotiations against Chisso and the national and prefectural government in various parts of the country. They fought desperately to demand sincere apologies and compensations. Besides, compensation to uncertified patients, who have not been certified as Minamata disease patients, has come up. Since the standard of recognition was considered too strict, the appropriateness of the recognition system started to be argued.

Although, Chisso's responsibility was clarified by lawsuits, the lawsuits were protracted over the administrative responsibility and made no progress. The administration was held responsible for setting a too strict of a recognition standard and not regulating the industrial wastewater to prevent the spread of the damages.

In 1990, the court advised a compromise to compensate quickly, considering the victims' advanced age. In response to this, the government proposed a settlement in 1995.

Most of the patients' group withdrew the cases and accepted the settlement reluctantly to receive compensation while they are alive. That was a harsh decision. Only the plaintiffs in Minamata disease Kansai case appealed to the Supreme Court to clarify the administration's responsibility, and the court made its judgment, recognizing the responsibility of the state and the local governments in 2004. A lot of tears have been shed so far, but we cannot recover lost lives and health. An ancient sage once said, "He is doubly fond that justifies his fondness." We have to admit mistakes of Minamata disease and pledge never to repeat them. Because, it concerns human life and dignity, especially in Minamata.

Exhibit 2 Permanent Exhibitions Panels, videos, photographs



■They had lived a peaceful life.

Minamata disease occurred in Shiranui Sea. The storytellers recount life near the sea in Minamata before Minamata disease happened.

■Japan aimed to be an industrially advanced nation.

A small village, Minamata, has grown to be an industrial city with Chisso Factory's growth.

■There was a sign of Minamata disease.

Eerie happenings happened one after another since 1950, such as floating fish, and cat's death from madness.

■Finally, it affected humans.

On May 1st, 1956, the existence of a disease with unknown cause was officially recognized.

The victims were discovered one after another. The victims and fishermen became desperately poor. Although suspicions about Chisso Factory's industrial wastewater became stronger, Chisso did not admit it. Besides, the national and prefectural government did not regulate the industrial wastewater. The industrial wastewater continued to be discharged to contaminate the sea.

■The government admitted it as a pollution-caused disease.

In 1968, 12 years after Minamata disease had been discovered, the national government finally announced that Minamata disease was a pollution-caused disease which had been caused by Chisso Minamata Factory's industrial wastewater. The victims started lawsuits and negotiations against Chisso and the national and prefectural government, asking for an apology and compensation.

■Solving Minamata disease issue

The patients' fights were protracted, because the national and prefectural government would not admit their responsibilities. For that reason, most of the patients' group agreed to the government's settlement proposal setting a condition that the patients should never start any disputes after this.

■Methyl mercury was discharged into the sea.

The methyl mercury entered into human body by eating seafood.

After methyl mercury was discharged into the sea with industrial wastewater, it accumulated in seafood in high concentrations through the food chain.

No one could ever imagine that the sea was contaminated, and people in a fishing village consumed a lot of fish from the sea every day. Consequently, tragedies occurred one after another.

■The symptoms of Minamata disease -"Cats" were used to investigate the cause.

Chisso ascertained that the cats had Minamata disease by experimenting cats by feeding Chisso's industrial wastewater. They kept on discharging the industrial wastewater to hide the truth, and it caused the spread of damage.

Other information about the relation between the mercury accumulation quantities in human body and the symptoms

■Both children and adults could get the disease.

Unborn children were also affected.

Information about children and adult Minamata disease and congenital Minamata disease
Minamata disease is a disease of methyl mercury poisoning. Methyl mercury accumulated in the body attacks the central nervous system. The symptoms include numbness, unsteadiness and trembling in the legs and hands, narrowing of the field of vision, loss of hearing, etc. In addition, another tragedy had occurred. Congenital Minamata disease patients were discovered, who were born with Minamata disease after being attacked by methyl mercury through the placenta of their mothers who consumed polluted fish.

Exhibit 3 Special Exhibitions

Panels showing Minamata citizen's efforts aiming at an environmentally friendly city; photographs of patients and the scenes of fishing at that time of Minamata disease; patients' meaningful words written on cloths, etc.

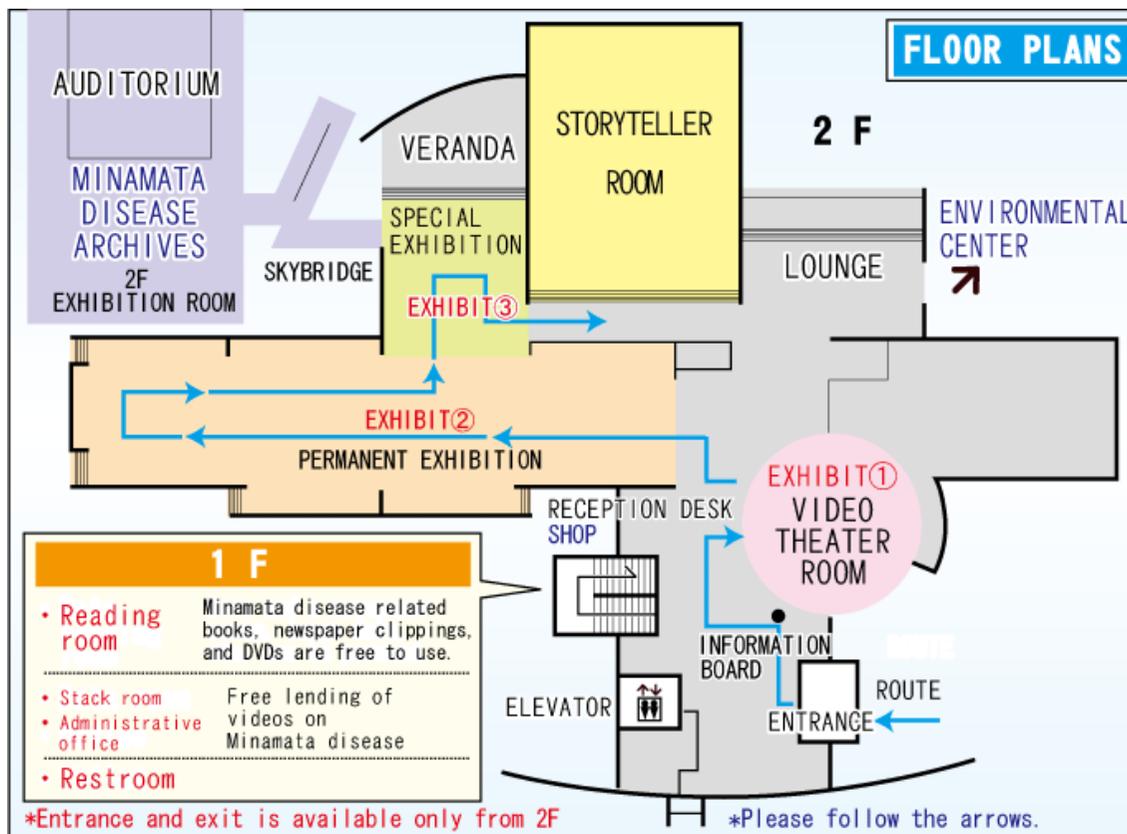


Storyteller Room

Minamata disease survivors have volunteered their time at our museum to speak about their painful experiences. The storytellers share their experiences, such as their life at that time, symptoms of Minamata disease, discrimination and prejudice from people around them.

*Appointment necessary.

*Free for groups of over 10 people.



Reading Room (1 F)

Books, newspaper clippings, and DVDs are free to use.



Museum shop

Books, postcards, T-shirts, accessories, teas, etc.



■The lesson was not learnt. -Methyl mercury poisoning in the world

Information about Niigata Minamata disease and other organic mercury poisoning in the world

■The sea was cleaned by treating sludge.

The relief system for the victims

Information about the Minamata disease recognition system and Comprehensive Measures of Minamata Disease Medical Care Project

Information about medical care and research on Minamata disease and Minamata Bay Pollution Prevention Project

Exhibit 1 Video Theater Room

The video of "Outline of Minamata Disease" is shown on a large screen.
(Running time: 16 minutes)



*Please sign your name at the information desk when you arrive.