

First 'baby hatch' to start operations this month

KUMAMOTO (Kyodo) A hospital in Kumamoto on Tuesday completed the nation's first "drop box" for people to leave infants they want taken into state care.

The so-called baby hatch, built into the wall of Jikei Hospital, will go into operation in mid-May.

The Roman Catholic-run hospital began work to install the box April 12 after the municipal government gave its permission April 5, amid controversy that it may encourage parents to abandon their children. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has also expressed reservations about the idea.



Japan's first "baby hatch" is completed Tuesday at Roman Catholic-run Jikei Hospital in the city of Kumamoto. It will be ready to take babies in mid-May. KYODO PHOTO

The city plans to conduct an inspection Tuesday on the baby hatch, which was installed on the hospital's first floor. The hospital will run a drill to instruct staff how to respond when a baby is dropped off.

The box, which the hospital calls "konotori no yurikago" (stork cradle), is accessible from outside the hospital through a door and is equipped with a bed and maintains the same conditions as an incubator.

Responding to the controversy over the plan, the hospital said it is based on a similar system in use in Germany, and is intended as an "emergency" measure to save the lives of babies who may otherwise be left to die.

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