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A first: Centenarians top 50,000

KYODO

The number of people in Japan aged 100 or older is expected to again set a record this year and top 50,000 for the first time, the health ministry said ahead of Respect for the Aged Day on Monday.

A survey released Friday by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry shows that centenarians are projected to total 51,376 as of this weekend, up 3,620 from a year earlier, marking the 42nd consecutive year of increase.

Women accounted for a record 87.3 percent of all centenarians this year. They numbered 44,842, up 3,248 from a year earlier. Male centenarians totaled 6,534, up 372. It was the 42nd straight year of rise for women and 32nd consecutive year of increase for men.

The nation's oldest person is Jiroemon Kimura, 115, from Kyoto, Kyoto Prefecture. He was born April 19, 1897. He is currently recognized as the world's oldest male by Guinness World Records. The oldest woman is Koto Okubo, a 114-year-old in Kawasaki. She was born Dec. 24, 1897.

Centenarians totaled 153 in 1963, when the annual survey was first made. It took 35 years to top 10,000 in 1998. The count then grew rapidly, surpassing 20,000 in 2003, 30,000 in 2007 and 40,000 in 2009.