A first: Centenarians top 50,000

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.

A survey released Friday by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry shows that centenarians are projected to total 51,726 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 45,342, up 3,208 from a year earlier. The number for men was 6,386, up 412.

The nation's oldest person is Jiroemon Kimura, 115, from Kyotango, 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 Koko Okubo, a 114-year-old from Kawasaki. She was born Dec. 24, 1897.

Japan's longest life expectancy is 84.2 years for women and 79.8 years for men.

The annual survey was made June 15. The number of centenarians then grew rapidly, surpassing 20,000 in 2003, 30,000 in 2007 and 40,000 in 2009.