

‘Vaccine Passports’ in Question as Countries Look for Ways to Reset Post-COVID-19

As European countries ponder new ways to regain some sense of normalcy moving into a potentially post-pandemic summer, COVID-19 vaccination passports are becoming a hot topic of conversation. Will the Biden administration follow suit?

The European Union recently proposed a “Digital Green Certificate to facilitate the safe free movement of citizens within the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic” which would be available in June, *The Washington Post* reports.

President Biden’s administration has been considering this option since January when he issued an executive order with the section, “Action to Implement Additional Public Health Measures for Domestic Travel.” The order gives public health authorities such as the secretary of state, the secretary of HHS and the secretary of homeland security the power to assess the feasibility of implementing a vaccination passport protocol for Americans.

However, the World Health Organization maintains “national authorities and conveyance operators should not introduce requirements of proof of COVID-19 vaccination for international travel as a condition for departure or entry, given that there are still critical unknowns regarding the efficacy of vaccination in reducing transmission.”

Both the process and the effectiveness of vaccination passports remain in question. Even so, the U.S. Travel Association and other groups have asked the Biden administration to set a May 1 deadline to come up with a plan

to reopen the U.S. to international visitors.

"If nothing is done to lift international travel bans and bring back demand, the U.S. Travel Association estimates that a total of a 1.1 million American jobs will not be restored and \$262 billion in export spending will be lost by the end of 2021," the groups wrote in a letter to the administration.

The national coordinator for health IT, Micky Tripathi, highlighted a primary concern among U.S. officials in monitoring and ensuring fair access to vaccination, and subsequent "passports," should it go into effect. Top concerns include protecting credentials against fraud, ensuring data security and making certain low-income populations aren't at a disadvantage.

"How do we make sure that whatever is available is accessible to everyone so no one is left behind or feeling like they can't participate in the return of their day-to-day activities?" Tripathi asked at a March 11 virtual meeting hosted by the Health IT Leadership Roundtable.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is an outspoken opponent of this idea, saying the notion is "completely unacceptable" and he will do everything in his power to ensure Floridians will not have to provide proof of inoculation to resume normal activities.

"You want to go to a movie theater, should you have to show that? No. You want to go to a game, [or] a theme park? No. So we're not supportive of that," he said, according to the *Orlando Sentinel*.

At a press conference Monday, DeSantis signed into law a bill, SB 72, that protects businesses, school and other institutions from "nuisance" lawsuits should someone sue them for contracting COVID-19 even when the business and subsequent workers followed social distancing and sanitary protocols.

"We don't want to be in a situation where people are scared of being sued just for doing normal things," DeSantis said. "I think that the Legislature has been able to deliver today, so we're excited about being here. We're excited about being able to sign the bill. I think it's very common sense."

With the signing of the bill, effective immediately, the governor stressed the negative effects "vaccination passports" would bring, calling for legislature to permanently ban any bills allowing them.

DeSantis is not the only one opposed to the idea of presenting proof of inoculation. Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene says those who support the vaccination passport are engaging "corporate communism," and likens it to "Biden's mark of the beast."

Marjorie Taylor Greene says that a vaccine passport is "Biden's Mark of the Beast" and that any company the requires one is engaging in "corporate communism."

– Right Wing Watch (@RightWingWatch) March 30, 2021

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem agrees, labeling the idea of a COVID passport "un-American."

The @joebiden #CovidPassport proposal is one of the most un American ideas in our nation's history. We as Americans should oppose this oppression.#freedom

– Kristi Noem (@KristiNoem) March 30, 2021

While proof of vaccination is not a new concept, with public schools and universities requiring it for student admission among other instances, this regulation has fostered concern over protecting American's freedoms and discerning whether this falls under the government's purview, as Andy Slavitt,

senior adviser to the White House coronavirus team, says it does. {eoa}

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