Vaccine Passport Trends

Tetsuhiro Nakagawa, Senior Representative of Japan International Transport and Tourism Institute, USA

Daisuke Takagi, Japan International Transport and Tourism Institute, USA

1. Introduction

A vaccine passport is a digitized information system that documents vaccination history for the novel coronavirus and PCR test results, making it simple to verify said information on a smartphone. This system aims to mitigate domestic travel restrictions and eliminate quarantine requirements at arrival and departure. There are big expectations from mainly aviation and travel industries that this card may allow for the resumption of international travel.

The discussion surrounding vaccine passports and their implementation status as of the writing this report (April 15th, 2021) for various parties will be covered in this report.

2. Issues over Vaccine Passports

As we will disclose more fully later, countries, companies, private organizations, and various groups are currently advancing development and introduction of vaccine passports. Below are the main points commonly raised in discussions about them.

(1) Discrimination Towards /Disadvantages for Individuals Who Are Unvaccinated

There are voices of opposition against implementing a vaccine passport as it may be discriminatory to individuals with allergies or some other ailment preventing them from getting vaccinated or those who do not want to.

The fact that only vaccinated people are allowed to enter and leave the country and are permitted significantly relaxed transportation restrictions are major disadvantages to those who aren't getting vaccinated that cannot be overlooked.

As information listed on vaccine passports will not be limited to only vaccination history, but also proof of negative test results, concerns over these disadvantages have been considered to be resolved to some level and allow for the unvaccinated to also receive benefits. In fact, in the EU, consideration for a system is being developed and implemented to not only record vaccine history, but to also include negative testing results and infection history.

In Japan, COVID-19 vaccine minister, Taro Kono, has indicated the formulation of a policy to prevent discrimination due to getting or not getting vaccinated[1].

(2) Effectiveness of the COVID-19 Vaccines in Infection Prevention

Vaccine availability for the novel coronavirus has been spreading worldwide, and vaccines have been found to be effective in preventing ailment onset and severe illness. However, the effectiveness of vaccines in lowering infection

---

[1] https://www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=2021041100198&g=pol

risks to oneself and others is still not verified. That is to say, it is nonsensical to relax travel restrictions based on whether people have been vaccinated from the perspective of preventing the spread of infection.

Regarding this point, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced their "Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People" on April 2nd, which includes eliminating quarantine for domestic travelers who have been vaccinated. It also includes the following point of views.

・The current COVID-19 vaccines approved in the U.S. are effective in preventing the onset of sickness and from becoming severely ill.

・There is increasing evidence that vaccinated people are less likely to get infected and infect others.

・The duration of vaccine effectiveness and its effectiveness against variants is still under investigation. Thus, preventive actions, such as wearing a mask, must be continued.

・However, the advantages of relaxing quarantine restrictions may outweigh the risks of vaccinated people infecting others.

・Furthermore, we can expect an improvement in vaccine acceptance and vaccination status by relaxing quarantine guidelines for vaccinated people.

・People must continue to follow guidance in public spaces, such as wearing a mask and social distancing.

Based on growing evidence that vaccinated people have a low risk of infection, the benefits of mitigating quarantine requirements may outweigh the risk of spread of the novel coronavirus for society as a whole, as well as being an incentive for getting vaccinated. Meanwhile, starting with mask wearing in public, preventive actions are still needed. It is worth recognizing "the relationship between the vaccine effectiveness and travel control / infection

prevention measures" in the United States, where vaccination is progressing ahead of other countries.

On the other hand, the World Health Organization (WHO) currently does not support the idea of requiring vaccine passport for international travel, as it is not certain yet whether vaccines provide infection prevention, and it could lead to discrimination again those not getting vaccinated.[2]

3. Implementation Status

3-1 Development of a comprehensive data platform for personal vaccination information and immigration regulations of each country (facilitation of international movement)

Parts (1) to (3) will introduce the endeavors taken to build a comprehensive data platform to facilitate international travel. Airlines in particular are leading the promotion of collecting personal vaccination information, etc., while taking into account the immigration regulations set by each country, to determine whether travel is possible.

(1) IATA : Travel Pass

As of April 14th, 27 airlines are conducting or planning to perform verification tests and trial operations to introduce the "Travel Pass" developed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).[3]

Among Japanese airlines, All Nippon Airways (ANA) is implementing the use of digital health passports issued by investigative agencies and is verifying these passports during regular procedures at airport counters, and Japan Airlines (JAL) is planning on conducting trial usage on some routes from late May. Other airlines that have implemented or are planning pilot operations of the "Travel Pass" are: Singapore Airlines, Qatar Airlines, Emirates

---

[2] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-who-vaccines-idUSKBN2BT158

[3] https://www.iata.org/en/programs/passenger/travel-pass/

Airlines, Etihad Airlines, IAG Group, Malaysia Airlines, Copa Airlines, Rwanda Airlines, New Zealand Airlines, Cantus Airlines, Air Baltic, Gulf Air, Air Serbia, Thai International Airlines, Thai Smile, Korean Airlines, Neos (Italian airline), Virgin Atlantic, Ethiopian Airlines, Vetjet, Hong Kong Airlines, Iberia Airlines, Saudia (Saudi Arabian airline), Swiss Airlines, and El Al Airlines (Israeli airline).[4] Additionally, the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore is focusing on incoming travelers, announcing the ability to use a travel pass to submit test results for the novel coronavirus upon arrival at Changi Airport or at check-in at airline counters from May 1st this year.[5]

With the introduction of the Travel Pass, IATA also aspires to resolve forgery issues of test results and vaccination certificates. The digital ID created by the Travel Pass is based on the Global Digital Travel Credentials (DTC) standards being developed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to enhance cybersecurity, with plans to compare it against biometric data and smartphone images taken by passengers.[6] By doing so, it is expected that there will be more certainty in test results and vaccination statuses from the perspective of both content and identity.

Currently, the IATA is planning on releasing the Travel Pass app on both iOS and Android by the end of April.[7]

(2) CommonPass (The Commons Project)

While Cathay Pacific and United Airlines were the first airlines to launch "Common Pass" in October 2020,[8] developed by the Swiss non-profit organization Commons Project, which was established with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, Qantas Airways was the first to conduct proof-of-concept experimental flights through Australian national repatriation flights from Frankfurt to Darwin.[9] Cathay Pacific has also partnered with Hong Kong Airlines to run trials on operating flights,[10] and Lufthansa began them on flights from Frankfurt to the United States and feeder flights from Hamburg, Berlin, etc. to Frankfurt.[11] The U.S. airline JetBlue has also worked with the Commons Project and the government of Aruba, a constituent country of the Netherlands, to introduce CommonPass on all its routes flying there.[12] In the case of Japanese airlines, both ANA and JAL are conducting demonstration experiments on some routes.[13]

(3) American and Other Airlines: VeriFLY

"VeriFLY" is an phone app developed by Daon of the United States, which offers personal authentication services using biometric verification technology.[14] In order for Americana Airlines to digitally organize COVID-19 test results and related documents, they first conducted trials of the app on routes from the United States to mainly the Caribbean and South American regions, and later installed the app on all international flights from January 23rd, 2021.[15] Moreover, British Airways has introduced it on all international flights to the United Kingdom,[16] and the U.S.'s Alaska Airlines[17] and Spain's Iberia Airlines[18] have also begun conducting trial operations. In Japan, JAL will follow boarding procedures using VeriFLY on some routes to North America from the end of April.[19] According to

[4] Same as footnote #2。

[5] https://www.caas.gov.sg/who-we-are/newsroom/Detail/singapore-and-iata-collaborate-to-drive-adoption-of-digital-health-certificates-for-air-travel

[6] https://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/pressroom/fact-sheets/fact-sheet---iata-travel-pass/

[7] https://www.iata.org/contentassets/2b02a4f452384b1fbae0a4c40e8a5d0c/travel-pass-faqs.pdf

[8] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ed685211872ca0609188980/t/5fc909f2384989346245ca2a/1607010802246/CommonPass+First+Pilot+PR+FINAL+10.6.2020.pdf

[9] https://www.qantasnewsroom.com.au/media-releases/qantas-trials-commonpass-digital-health-pass-on-repatriation-flights/

[10] https://news.cathaypacific.com/cathay-pacific-pursues-the-adoption-of-digital-travel-passes-to-facilitate-international-travel

[11] https://www.lufthansagroup.com/en/newsroom/releases/lufthansa-integrates-health-data-app-into-digital-travel-chain.html

[12] https://www.airportaruba.com/press-releases/jetblue-airways-and-the-commons-project-131

[13] https://www.anahd.co.jp/group/pr/202103/20210329.html。See footnote #4 for JAL。

[14] https://www.daon.com/products/verifly

[15] https://news.aa.com/news/news-details/2021/American-Airlines-Is-First-US-Airline-to-Introduce-Health-Passport-for-All-International-Travel-to-US-OPS-DIS-01/default.aspx

[16] https://mediacentre.britishairways.com/pressrelease/details/86/0/12830

[17] https://newsroom.alaskaair.com/2021-02-04-Alaska-Airlines-offers-international-fliers-VeriFLY-mobile-health-passport-for-required-COVID-docs

[18] https://www.iberia.com/es/en/covid-19/verifly/

[19] https://press.jal.co.jp/ja/release/202104/006026.html

Daon's press release, the VeriFLY app has over 200,000 users in 55 countries, and is used on more than 300 flights per day as of the end of February 2021.[20]

3-2 Digitization of Vaccination Certificates (promoting travel within countries / regions)

Next, Parts (4) through (7) will cover the efforts being made to digitize information, such as vaccination history. Rather than paper certification, electric QR codes are being introduced to verify vaccination in countries where they are administered. The international platforms introduced in 3-1 are also expected to be mutually used and integrated in the future.

(4) EU: Digital Green Certificate

To promote the safe movement of EU citizens and their families, as well as individuals from third-world countries who legally reside in the EU or regional member states, the EU is advancing the development and introduction of a "digital green certificate," an electrical means to confirm vaccine certification for the novel coronavirus, negative test results, and recovery from infection. Meanwhile, a draft bill was proposed at the European Commission on March 17th of this year, and the European Parliament decided to adopt emergency measure to expedite passing of the proposal on March 25th.[21] The European Parliament and the European Council will begin discussion at meetings held from April 26th to 29th, with the aim of enactments made by June.[22] Furthermore, along will every EU member state, the certificate will also be introduced in Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

Aviation and tourism industry related companies have responded to this development in the EU, with IATA,

Airlines for Europe, Airports Council International Europe (ACI Europe), the European Aerospace Defense Industry Association, Civil Air Navigation Services Organization (CANSO), and the European Regional Airlines Association (ERA) publishing a joint-statement welcoming the proposal.[23] Meanwhile ACI Europe,[24] World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC),[25] Austrian Airlines,[26] and Air Malta [27] have also expressed their intended support. Additionally, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) also welcomed the move, calling on Europe to lead in reviving tourism.[28] Considerations to make the certificate compatible for use in countries outside of the EU have also been announced.

(5) Israel

Vaccination for the novel coronavirus began in Israel in December 2020, with over half the population, or 4.94 million residents, fully vaccinated by April 12th, the fastest pace worldwide. A "Green Pass" certificate was issued nationally, which display when a week has passed since the recipient has received both vaccine shots, and which is required to be shown at sports gyms and event venues. Anyone who has received two shots of the vaccine is able to receive the Green Pass through the official Israeli government website, which then can be viewed in a app developed by the government for this particular purpose.[29]A paper certificate can also otherwise be issued for those who do not have a smartphone.

(6) China

On March 8th, 2021, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that they would begin utilizing a digital vaccine certificate, named the "International Travel Health

---

[20] https://www.daon.com/company/newsroom/press-releases/1071-verifly-world-s-first-widely-adopted-mobile-health-passport-now-with-more-than-200-000-active-users-in-55-countries-across-6-continents

[21] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210323IPR00654/parliament-fast-tracks-procedure-to-adopt-digital-green-certificate-by-june

[22] Same as footnote #15.

[23] https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/pr/2021-03-17-01/

[24] https://www.aci-europe.org/press-release/309-europe-s-aviation-sector-welcomes-digital-green-certificate-proposal-whilst-urging-wider-restart-plan.html

[25] https://wttc.org/News-Article/WTTC-welcomes-European-Commissions-

proposal-for-the-EU-wide-Digital-Green-Certificate
https://wttc.org/News-Article/Global-TandT-sector-suffered-a-loss-of-almost-US4-trillion-in-2020

[26]
https://www.austrianairlines.ag/Press/PressReleases/Press/2021/03/015.aspx?sc_lang=en&mode=%7b30999B4B-42D0-45A6-B671-FE5E3CB68ED8%7d

[27] https://www.airmalta.com/information/about/news-overview/news-detail/006-2021-en

[28] https://www.unwto.org/news/la-omt-celebra-el-apoyo-de-la-ue-e-insta-a-europa-a-liderar-el-reinicio-del-turismo

[29] https://corona.health.gov.il/en/green-pass/

Certificate."[30] Meant for citizens entering and departing China, this certificate details vaccination status, including date of shots, vaccine manufacturer, type of vaccine, and loop-mediated isothermal amplification (LAMP) and IgM antibody test results, which can be viewed via a QR code provided by the managing authority. Additionally, a paper certificate may be printed and used.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs also announced that they are in talks with other countries for this certificate to be mutually recognized. The certificate can be obtained through a mini-app within the messenger app "WeChat," developed by the Chinese IT company Tencent.

(7) Other

In the United States, Clear's "Health Pass" app provides confirmation of test results for flights operating by Delta and United Airlines from Los Angeles International Airport to Honolulu, as well as admission to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum.[31] In addition, the state of New York has partnered with IBM to announce the introduction of the "NYS Excelsior Pass Wallet," an app allowing for vaccination and test certificates to be shown upon entering events using a QR code.[32]

Therefore, there are some parts of the United States where digitized negative test results and vaccination certificates are being used in travel and by certain institutions, but the federal government has declared that they do not support the creation of a vaccine database at the federal level or a system that would require the possession of a certificate, from the viewpoint of protecting citizen privacy and human rights.[33]

In Europe, demonstration experiments of the "Health Travel Pass" has been conducted in Netherlands, with the creators of the Health Travel Pass, France-based company IDEMIA, emphasizing the safety of the product with its development complying with specifications set in ICAO standards.[34]

4. From Hereafter

As mentioned above, vaccine passports are currently being developed and introduced by various governments, companies, and private organizations. While it is desirable for there to be a global discussion on unifying systems and shared certification usage in order to promote and facilitate future international travel, currently no such talks are taking place, and "disorderly" or "competitive" conditions may continue for the time being.

In the future, as vaccines become more widespread and people eagerly resume traveling internationally, the momentum to introduce vaccine passports for arrivals and departures is expected to increase. Although currently there are some uncertainties surrounding vaccine effectiveness and efficacy, we strongly expect that every government will conduct proper examinations and necessary preparations to proceed in introducing vaccine passports.

---

[30] https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1859359.shtml

[31] https://www.clearme.com/healthpass

[32] https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-launch-excelsior-pass-help-fast-track-reopening-businesses-and

[33] https://www.bbc.com/japanese/56658286

[34] https://www.idemia.com/press-release/idemia-launches-health-travel-pass-which-seeks-help-governments-boost-border-crossing-traveler-traffic-2021-04-12