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Why we need vaccine passports—and why they'll never happen

These digital documents promise to provide their owner with unfettered access to everything travel offers, much like the old normal many of us yearn for. Sounds good in theory, but there's a catch. Actually, several of them.

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A traveler uses the 'TousAntiCovid' coronavirus tracing app to board a flight at Orly Airport in Paris. France is moving toward a broad rollout of digital health certificates, putting the country at the forefront of a European Union push for vaccine passports to jumpstart travel.

Pent-up demand for domestic and international travel is overwhelming. **TSA checkpoints are routinely seeing over one million screenings per day, with many days topping 1.5 million.** The traditional spring travel season has begun all while widespread COVID-19 vaccination is occurring, with upwards of **three million doses being administered daily.**

Amidst all of this, discussion of a **"Vaccine Passport"** has surfaced. This would provide proof that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19, with the belief that they are safe from infection and less likely to spread the virus. A Vaccine Passport would provide their owner with unfettered access to everything that travel offers, much like the old normal many of us yearn for.

Sounds good in theory. The problem is that Vaccine Passports will not work, and if they are implemented, will not be effective.

So, what are the obstacles to Vaccine Passports?

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Like citizenship passports, or enrollment in **Global Entry** and **TSA PreCheck**, a government agency verification and validation process stands behind the information associated with your passport or enrollment.

With COVID-19 vaccine distribution, the supply chain headwinds that had to be overcome just to get people vaccinated required a makeshift system to deliver and administer vaccines and traverse the last mile of getting shots into people's arms.

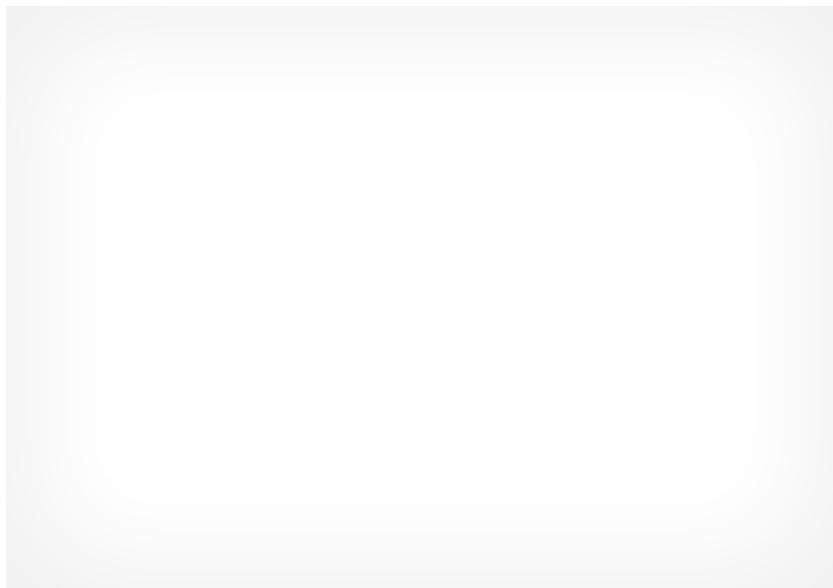
Asking an agency like the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** to backfill the verification process would be a bureaucratic nightmare. Relying on the private sector, like **the Vaccine Credential Initiative**, would still require a significant government involvement. Without such a verification process, Vaccine Passports would be subject to forgeries, particularly for those not interested in being vaccinated, or who believe that the health risk due to the virus has been overblown. Given that in some areas of the country, **people are unwilling to wear a face covering in public**, asking these same people to be vaccinated is a bar too high for many to jump.

Additionally, **the travel industry, particularly air, hotels, cruise lines and rail, have been overwhelmingly impacted by COVID-19.** They are all ripe to welcome back customers to regain economic stability. Asking customers to provide a Vaccine Passport presents yet another obstacle to their recovery. As such, they will advertise the requirements, but when faced with losing customers, will likely turn a blind eye if a customer cannot meet them, creating trust issues between customers and the travel industry. This is similar to what is occurring today at many hotels, which advertise face covering requirements, but do not turn customers away if they refuse to comply.

It is clear that vaccines are the **best defense** we have against the virus, but they are not 100 percent effective. As such, Vaccine Passports only indicate that a person is at significantly lower risk of contracting or transmitting the virus, not at zero risk. Although for any one individual, this risk is small, at the population level, across millions of people, this risk is measurable. That is why, even at a **large amusement venue** like Disney World, the population risk over several weeks among all vaccinated visitors could lead to a handful of rogue infections.

Vaccine Passports are a great idea that will never occur, and if they do, will not be successful. The strongest path forward for reinvigorating travel is widespread vaccination, ongoing surveillance of vaccine effectiveness and preparation for booster vaccination if or when the effectiveness of current vaccines wanes. The best protection that an individual can take is to get vaccinated and continue to follow the necessary steps to prevent infection and transmission if infected—something that a Vaccine Passport cannot provide.

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