



## DEBATE PACK

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# Debate on an e-petition relating to Covid-19 vaccine passports

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## Summary

This briefing has been produced ahead of the debate to be held in Westminster Hall on Monday 15 March 2021 at 4.30 pm on e-petition 569957 (Covid-19 vaccine passports). The debate will be led by Mike Hill MP.

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# 1. Summary

An e-petition on [Do not rollout Covid-19 vaccine passports](#) (569957) has received over 280,000 signatures. It calls on the Government to “commit to not rolling out any e-vaccination status/immunity passport to the British public”.

The Government published a [response](#) to the petition on 3 March 2021.

It will be debated in Westminster Hall on Monday 15 March 2021 at 4.30pm. The debate will be led by Mike Hill MP.

## 1.1 What is a vaccine passport?

A ‘vaccine passport’ refers to documentation certifying that the holder has been vaccinated against a specific disease / virus. They are sometimes referred to as ‘immunity passports’ or ‘immunity certificates’. In the context of Covid-19, the latter term has encompassed test results that demonstrate a person is not currently infected with Covid-19 (eg a negative result from a PCR test), or that they have immunity to the SARS-Cov-2 virus (eg from past infection).

The purpose of a vaccine passport is to enable the holder to undertake certain activities not available to others, since possession of a passport in theory demonstrates to those checking it that the holder is a reduced risk to public health. While passports are typically thought of in the context of facilitating international travel, Covid-19 vaccine passports have also been proposed for use in a domestic setting. Some UK employers, for example, are looking into whether a Covid-19 passport or certificate could be required to work in certain settings, like health and social care. Others have suggested that they could be used to enable access to cinemas and other venues.<sup>1</sup>

The House of Commons Library has produced two briefings of relevance to the debate on vaccine passports which have further information on their potential applications:

[Coronavirus: Covid-19 vaccine roll-out. Frequently Asked Questions](#), 4 March 2021 (see section 7);

[Coronavirus: Returning to work](#), 3 March 2021 (see section 2.6 on vaccinations and employment law).

Vaccine passports could also, in theory, exempt the passport holder from certain practices commonly used to minimise the spread of the SARS-Cov-2 virus, such as any requirement to quarantine following international travel. A variety of technologies have been suggested to facilitate vaccine passports, from apps and QR codes, through to physical cards.

In practice, evidence is still emerging as to whether a person’s Covid-19 vaccination status (or proof of prior infection) provides clear enough

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<sup>1</sup> [Covid certificates’ for vaccines could unlock mass events](#), *The Times*, 23 February 2021

evidence that they cannot transmit the virus to others. Early in the pandemic, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) published guidance stating that there was “not enough evidence about the effectiveness of antibody-mediated immunity to Covid-19 to guarantee the accuracy of an “immunity passport” or “risk-free certificate”. The WHO said it would update its guidance as new evidence becomes available.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 Country-based initiatives

As more evidence becomes available about the impact of Covid-19 vaccination on transmission, international bodies, individual countries, and industry, have begun to develop vaccine passports and certification schemes. Israel, for example, has developed a “[green pass](#)”, displayed on an app, to show that a person has received a Covid-19 vaccine. It can be used to access indoor seating in restaurants and to attend events in stadiums/arenas, among other things.<sup>3</sup> In the United States, President Biden announced an assessment of the “feasibility of linking COVID-19 vaccination to International Certificates of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP) and producing electronic versions of ICVPs” in his [National Strategy for the Covid-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness](#).<sup>4</sup>

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), the trade association for the world’s airlines, is also developing its [Travel Pass App](#), which incorporates four open sourced and interoperable modules which can be “combined for an end-to-end solution”. The four modules will:

- enable passengers to research health requirements for a particular journey;
- help passengers to locate testing centres;
- allow authorised laboratories and test centres to send test results and vaccination certificates to passengers securely and;
- allow passengers to manage their travel documentation digitally through creating a digital passport, verifying that their test/vaccination meets requirements and providing them with the ability to share test or vaccination certificates with authorities to enable travel.

Details of other international and industry schemes can be found in the Royal Society’s publication on [Twelve criteria for the development and use of COVID-19 vaccine passports](#) (February 2021).

## 1.3 What is the Government’s policy on vaccine passports?

In its [COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021](#) (roadmap) document, published in February 2021, the Government stated that it was undertaking a review of whether “COVID-status certification could play

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<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, [“Immunity passports” in the context of COVID-19, Scientific Brief](#), 24 April 2020

<sup>3</sup> [Israel reopens to fully vaccinated ‘Green Pass’ holders — nearly half of the population](#), *New York Times*, 7 March 2021

<sup>4</sup> [Israel’s “green pass” is an early vision of how we leave lockdown](#), *MIT Technology Review*, 1 March 2021; President Joseph R. Biden Jr, [National Strategy for the Covid-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness](#), January 2021, p181

a role in reopening [the] economy, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety". It defined COVID status certification as "using testing or vaccination data to confirm in different settings that people have a lower risk of transmitting COVID-19 to others". The review is expected to report around 21 June 2021 and is to consider the "ethical, equalities, privacy, legal and operational aspects" of certification. In response to a question in the Lords about vaccine passports for the purposes of international travel, the Health Minister, Lord Bethell, stated that the Government also has a "Cabinet Office programme which is co-ordinating across government initiatives on vaccine certification".<sup>5</sup>

The Opposition has stated that it is "open" to the idea of vaccine passports. Speaking on the BBC's Andrew Marr Show in early February 2021, the shadow business secretary, Ed Miliband, said he thought the UK should be "open" to the prospect, adding that "they may be necessary."<sup>6</sup>

### Government response to the e-petition

The Government [issued the following response](#) to e-petition 569957:

The Government is reviewing whether COVID-status certificates could play a role in reopening parts of our economy, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety.

As set out in the roadmap by the Prime Minister, this review will include assessing to what extent certification would be effective in reducing risk, and the potential uses to enable access to settings or a relaxation of COVID-Secure mitigations. The Government will also consider the ethical, equalities, privacy, legal and operational aspects of this approach and what limits, if any, should be placed on organisations using certification. It will draw on external advice to develop recommendations that take into account any social and economic impacts, and implications for disproportionately impacted groups and individuals' privacy and security. The Government will set out its conclusions in advance of Step 4 in order to inform the safe reopening of society and the economy.

As the Prime Minister has said, there are complex ethical issues - and we can't discriminate against people who, for whatever reason, haven't had a vaccine.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.4 Stakeholder views on vaccine passports

Reactions to the prospect of vaccine passports have been mixed. Many of the sectors that the pandemic has either closed, or curtailed their output, have encouraged their development. The travel industry, for example, has welcomed vaccine passports as an opportunity to get the sector fully operational once more and is working on different vaccine

<sup>5</sup> [HL Deb, 9 March 2021, c1461](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Being open is not a position! BBC Marr savages Miliband over Labour flip-flopping. Sunday Express, 7 February 2021](#)

<sup>7</sup> "Step 4" is scheduled to take place no earlier than 21 June by which point the government hopes to introduce no legal limits on social contact and no legal limit on life events while opening night clubs and large events.

passport schemes.<sup>8</sup> Responding to the publication of the Government's 'roadmap' in February 2021, the managing director of TUI UK and Ireland, Andrew Flintham, stated that the:

announcement from the prime minister on 22 February was positive and shows that by working with the travel industry on a risk-based framework our customers will have the opportunity to travel abroad this summer.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, representatives from the UK music industry have suggested that vaccine passports could enable summer music festivals to take place.<sup>10</sup> Certain employers have also already gone on the record to state that all new recruits must be vaccinated unless they have a "reasonable excuse".<sup>11</sup>

Civil liberties and human rights groups, however, have emphasised that they are worried about the possible introduction of vaccine passports. Liberty, for example, has argued that "immunity passports would be an over-reach on our rights", adding that it is "impossible to have immunity passports which do not result in human rights abuses":

Even the introduction of a voluntary passport to prove if you've had a vaccine could result in many being blocked from essential public services, work or housing. Meanwhile once these passports have been created for one purpose – like travel – it would be all too easy for their use to be extended and abused. This would result in a two-tier system in which some people can access freedoms and support while others are shut out – with the most marginalised among us hardest hit.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [COVID-19: Travel industry calls for vaccine passports and relaxation of travel advice as part of easing lockdown restrictions](#), *Sky News Online*, 20 February 2021; Which?, [Will COVID-19 vaccine passports kick-start travel again?](#), 5 March 2021

<sup>9</sup> [COVID-19: PM promises 'vaccine passports' review as holiday-starved Britons flock to book a break after lockdown exit plans revealed](#), *Sky News [online]*, 23 February 2021

<sup>10</sup> [UK music bosses call for vaccine passports for festivals](#), *Yahoo Finance*, 7 March 2021; [Fans and artists must have Covid vaccine before attending music festivals, say some organisers](#), *The Guardian*, 6 March 2021

<sup>11</sup> [Covid: What would 'vaccine passports' mean for businesses, jobs or going to the pub when lockdown ends?](#), *ITV News [online]* 24 February 2021

<sup>12</sup> Liberty, [Liberty's view on immunity passports](#), 9 February 2021; [Freedom and fairness: Covid vaccine passport plans cause global unease](#), *The Guardian*, 7 February 2021

## 2. Press Articles

*Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.*

### **The Times**

[Vaccination passport to unlock Europe for UK tourists](#), 2 March 2021

### **Business Traveller**

[Vaccine passports - a guide to the different options](#), 2 March 2021

### **The Guardian**

[Green pass: how are Covid vaccine passports working for Israel?](#), 28 February 2021

### **ITV News**

[Covid: What would 'vaccine passports' mean for businesses, jobs or going to the pub when lockdown ends?](#), 24 February 2021

### **The Guardian**

[Calls for mandatory Covid jobs conflict with Britons' right to say no](#), 24 February 2021

### **Financial Times**

[Covid test being considered as alternative to vaccine passport](#), FT, 23 February 2021

### **Business Traveller**

[Vaccine passports - arguments for and against](#), 23 February 2021

### **The Telegraph**

[Vaccine passports could shut young people out of pubs and nightclubs until autumn](#), 17 February 2021

### **The Independent**

[Vaccine passports: How would documents work within the UK?](#), 16 February 2021

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**The Guardian**

[What are the pros and cons of Covid vaccine passports?](#), 14 February 2021



## 3. Parliamentary Material

### 3.1 Parliamentary Questions

#### [COVID-19 Vaccine Certification](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Harris of Haringey

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the statement by the Prime Minister on 23 February (HC Deb, col 627), when they will provide further details of their review of the potential role of COVID-19 vaccine certification; and what organisations will be involved in that review.

**Answered by:** Lord True (Conservative), The Minister of State, Cabinet Office

My Lords, as set out in the Covid-19 response document published last week, the Government will review whether Covid status certification could play a role in reopening our economy, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety. My right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will lead the review, and he is currently considering the approach to its conduct.

04 Mar 2021 | Oral answers to questions | House of Lords | 810 c1244

#### [Coronavirus: Vaccination](#)

**Asked by:** Davey, Ed | **Party:** Liberal Democrats

To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, what the planned timescale is for the review on covid-19 vaccine passports.

**Answering member:** Penny Mordaunt | **Party:** Conservative Party  
| **Department:** Cabinet Office

As set out in the COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021, published on 22 February, the Government will review whether COVID-status certification could play a role in reopening our economy, reducing restrictions on social contact and improving safety. The Government will set out its conclusions ahead of Step 4 of the roadmap, which will happen no earlier than 21 June.

02 Mar 2021 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 157949

#### [Covid-19: Vaccination Passport](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Foulkes of Cumnock | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they plan to have with the devolved Administrations about the introduction of a COVID-19 vaccination passport to enable those who have been vaccinated to travel.

**Answered by:** The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Lord True) (Con)  
**| Party:** Conservative Party

My Lords, the Government remain committed to restarting the travel industry, as the Prime Minister has set out in his road map. Vaccinations could offer the route to that once we know more about the impact of vaccines on transmission and their efficacy. The UK is working with other countries to adopt a clear international framework on standards and we are committed absolutely to working with the devolved Administrations throughout at both official and ministerial levels.

24 Feb 2021 | Oral questions - Lead | Answered | House of Lords | House of Lords chamber | 810 cc838-841

#### [Covid-19: Vaccination Passport](#)

**Asked by:** Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab) [V] | **Party:** Labour Party

My Lords, if the certificates or passports were to happen, it would be essential to have just one system across the UK. It must not be just one Government doing it and imposing them on the other countries; they must be jointly developed. The Minister talked about the road map, but that was shared with the Welsh Government only after it had been briefed to the press, on Monday morning. Can the Minister assure us that, if there is work on this, it will be done jointly by all four Governments, so that there is only one system for the whole UK?

**Answering member:** Lord True (Con) | **Party:** Conservative Party

The noble Baroness, as always, make a profound point, which is that the best thing that we must wish and work for is that all Administrations work together on this. We do not want internal divides. My right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is speaking further to First Ministers today, which is another opportunity to reflect on the details of the published road maps. I take what she said: we will continue to work with the devolved Administrations to reflect on the implications of the road maps, and to co-ordinate and co-operate on our response to this and other areas.

24 Feb 2021 | Oral answers to questions | House of Lords | House of Lords chamber | 810 c840

#### [Covid-19: Vaccination Passport](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op) [V] | **Party:** Labour Party

Does the Minister agree that it is important to differentiate between a certificate that might allow access to venues in the United Kingdom and one that would allow travel overseas, such as the one I have for yellow fever and malaria? Can he tell us which countries he and the Government are now in discussions with to enable to us to get back to

travelling as soon as possible so that the travel industry can return to a financially sound situation?

**Answering member:** Lord True (Con) | **Party:** Conservative Party

My Lords, I agree with the noble Lord, but these are two entirely separate issues. I assure him that the UK is working with a wide range of other countries and that the Government will make this a reality through ongoing work not only with other countries, but with the World Health Organization and other multilateral organisations, and through the UK's presidency of the G7. The point the noble Lord has made is an important one.

24 Feb 2021 | Oral answers to questions | House of Lords | House of Lords chamber | 810 c838

### [Coronavirus: Supporting Businesses and Individuals](#)

**Member:** John Spellar | **Party:** Labour Party

If premises are physically covid secure, and their customers have vaccine certificates, why will the Government not let them open earlier?

**Answering Member:** Anne-Marie Trevelyan | **Party:** Conservative Party

The roadmap sets it out very clearly, as the Prime Minister has done as well, that we will open safely and steadily, making sure that we do not have to return to any kind of lockdown. We want to go at the right speed and steadily to make sure that we can get there.

23 Feb 2021 | Proceeding contributions | House of Commons | House of Commons chamber | 689 c871

### [Coronavirus: Vaccination](#)

**Asked by:** Chope, Sir Christopher | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it the policy of the Government to issue (a) green passports to people who have been vaccinated against covid-19, (b) temporary green passports valid for six months to people who have recovered from covid-19 and (c) proof of vaccination documents for people wishing to travel overseas.

**Answering member:** Nadhim Zahawi | **Party:** Conservative Party  
| **Department:** Department of Health and Social Care

We have no plans to introduce COVID-19 vaccine passports. As with other vaccination programmes, vaccine record cards are issued to patients with the relevant details about the vaccine including the date of their vaccination and their vaccine type. This does not constitute an immunity passport and will not be used as a form of identification.

25 Jan 2021 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 133629

## 3.2 Select committee report

House of Commons Transport Committee, [The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the aviation sector: Interim report](#), Fifth Report of Session 2019–21, HC 1257, Published on 11 March 2021

## 4. Further reading

Ada Lovelace Institute, [International monitor: vaccine passports and COVID status apps](#) [A tracker collating developments in policy and practices around vaccine certification and COVID status apps as they emerge around the world], updated 28 Feb 2021

The Royal Society, [Twelve criteria for the development and use of COVID-19 vaccine passports](#), 14 February 2021

[COVID-19 immunity passports and vaccination certificates: scientific, equitable, and legal challenges](#), The Lancet, 4 May 2020

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