

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Digital health certificates may encourage safe reopening: Deloitte

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*Digital health certificates may help businesses reopen. Image credit: New York State*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Digital health credentials, occasionally colloquially referred to as vaccine passports, have spurred criticism, but some experts believe these certifications can speed up the economic recovery.

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Some governments, from the state to national levels, have implemented the use of digital health credentials to verify COVID-19 vaccination status. As businesses particularly those in the hospitality industries look to resume more normal operations, these credentials may prove essential in protecting both consumers and employees.

"Digital health credentials have gone from niche to mainstream in a matter of months," said Jamie Sawchuk, global citizen digital ID co-lead at Deloitte Canada, during a [Deloitte webinar](#).

### Digital health data

COVID-19 has cost the globe trillions of dollars, beyond the human toll and loss, making it unique from other infectious diseases. To stem the spread of COVID-19, countries shut down borders or implemented extended quarantine periods, but these solutions are not scalable as restrictions lift and vaccinations increase.

Health credentials have been used in the past to ensure travelers have been vaccinated against infectious diseases such as yellow fever, cholera and typhoid. The nature of COVID-19, a relatively new and infectious airborne disease, makes health certificates more in demand for both governments and businesses.



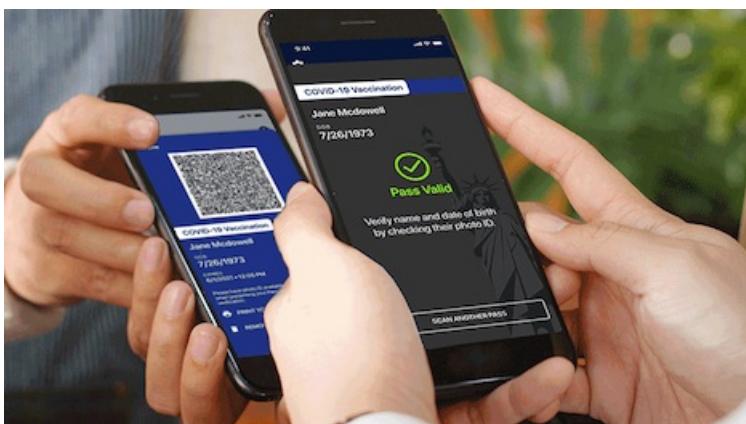
*Consumers are seeking more frictionless experiences, powered by apps. Image credit: Four Seasons*

Traditionally, health certificates have been paper-based systems, but these have several limitations. Paper-based systems are less secure and more difficult to scale than digital certificates, particularly at a time when consumers have embraced touchless payments and other technologies for frictionless experiences.

However, according to Mr. Sawchuk, businesses and governments must be prepared for health credentials to be available in both digital and paper forms.

Digitally, these often take the form of secure mobile apps that show scannable QR codes to confirm vaccination status without revealing other health information. Systems must be user-friendly and place consumers in control of their data, rather than businesses or governments.

Consumers must also be empowered to make their own decisions about their credentials, which are typically issued by health providers to verify vaccination status to companies or governments further differentiating "vaccine passports" from traditional, government-issued documentation.



*New York State has launched Excelsior Pass, a digital health pass. Image credit: New York State*

Creating secure and transparent vaccine credential systems can also improve consumer confidence, both in using certificates and participating in events or activities that require such certificates.

Implementing digital health certificates now may also help avoid complications in the coming years, per Mr. Sawchuk, if new COVID-19 variants are identified or vaccine efficacy wanes possibly requiring credentials to expire or be revoked.

#### Vaccine passports in action

Perspectives around digital health certificates may further evolve in light of the latest recommendations from U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

On May 13, the CDC announced fully vaccinated people in the U.S. do not need to wear masks in most outdoor and indoor settings, leading businesses, including major retailers, and states to reevaluate masks requirements sooner than some had expected.

Mask usage has proven to be an effective prevention strategy against coronavirus, and lifting mask mandates may increase demand for vaccine verification systems among consumers.

Some states and industries are already at odds with vaccine requirements. Norwegian Cruise Line, owner of Regent

Seven Seas Cruises, has suggested not porting in Florida after the state governor signed an order banning businesses from requiring proof of vaccination.

Whether in the form of digital vaccine passports or not, leveraging technology will be crucial for luxury hospitality brands to help consumers feel confident about resuming travel.

According a fall 2020 survey from Amadeus, 84 percent of consumers report technology would increase their confidence in traveling the next 12 months.

More than four in 10 travelers, 43 percent, are concerned about the increased risk of catching or transmitting the virus while traveling. Smartphones and mobile applications are the most accessible ways for travel brands to introduce technologies that will assuage consumer concerns, such as COVID-19 alerts, contactless payments and mobile boarding passes ([see story](#)).

Most countries as well as airlines and hotels have implemented safety measures such as requiring negative COVID-19 test results, mask wearing, temperature checks, social distancing and more. Although there are legitimate questions about vaccine passports several of which use blockchain technology to safeguard consumer data preventing businesses from screening patrons may actually hamper the hospitality recovery ([see story](#)).

"Airlines, airports and other agencies don't want to get into the business of handling health credentials," Mr. Sawchuk said. "They just want to know consumers have the right credentials to get on a plane or cross a border."

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