

# Update on **International travel in the context of COVID-19**

THE LATEST ON THE COVID-19 GLOBAL SITUATION &  
VACCINE CERTIFICATION AND TESTING IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL



World Health  
Organization

**EPI**•WiN

infodemic  
MANAGEMENT

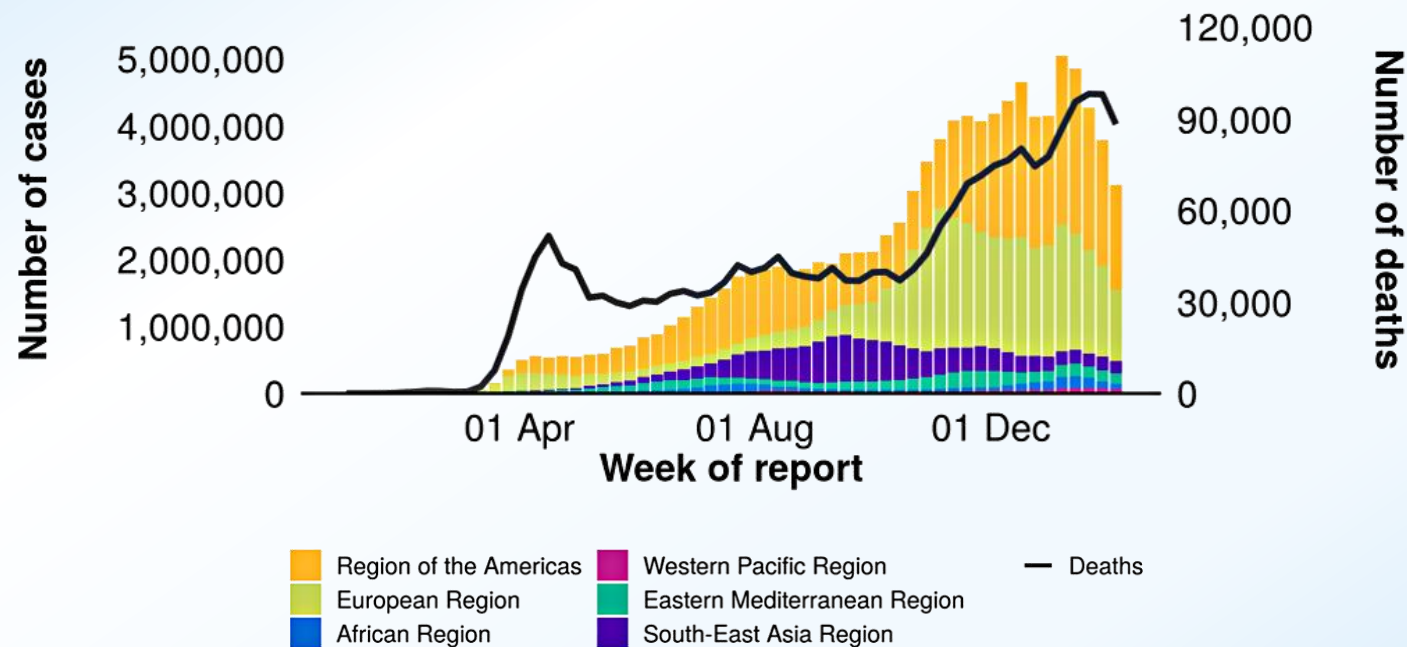
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# Current global situation

CASES REPORTED TO WHO AS OF 14 MARCH 2021, 10:00 CEST

- Cases: > 119 million
- Deaths: > 2.6 million



\* Data are incomplete for the current week. Cases depicted by bars; deaths depicted by line



CHECK OUT THE LATEST  
GLOBAL SITUATION

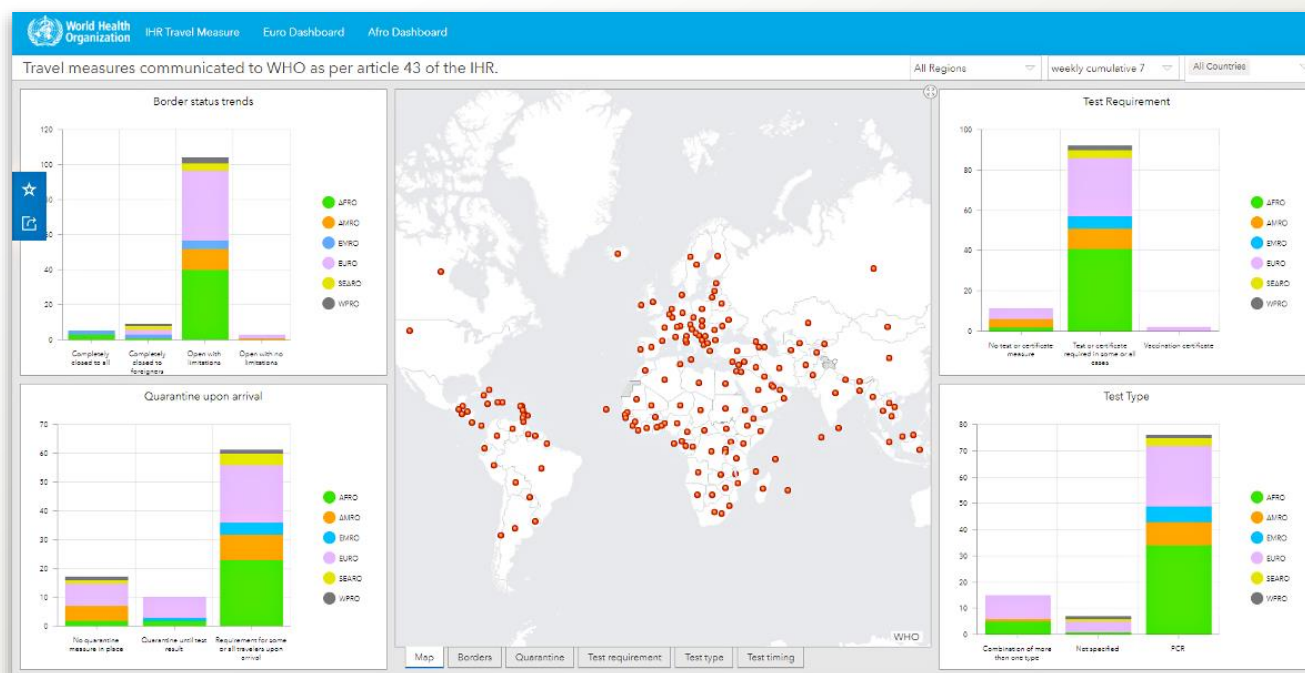
[WHO](#)  
[Coronavirus](#)  
[Disease \(COVID-19\)](#)  
[Dashboard](#)

# World wide travel measures in place

AS OF 15 MARCH 2021:

- **Four countries** require a **vaccination certificate** as a condition for exemption of quarantine
- **Six countries** require **vaccination certificate** as a condition for exemption of testing
- **Twenty-five countries** require a combination of tests before and/or after arrival
- **Sixty-three countries** require **quarantine** upon arrival

Figure. WHO IHR travel measure dashboard



# The role of the IHR\* Emergency Committee in the context of vaccination and international travel

The International Health Regulation (IHR) Emergency Committee:

## 1. Advises WHO to:

- Rapidly develop and disseminate a **policy position paper** on the legal, ethical, scientific, and technological considerations **related to requirements for proof of COVID-19 vaccination for international travelers**
- Coordinate with relevant stakeholders the development of **standards for digital documentation of COVID-19 travel-related risk reduction measures**, including vaccination status in preparation for widespread vaccine access

**2. Based on EC's advice, the WHO Director-General issued a set of Temporary Recommendations for States Parties, including in relation to proof of vaccination for international travel – see next slide**

[Statement on the sixth meeting of the IHR \(2005\) Emergency Committee regarding the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)

\*International health regulation

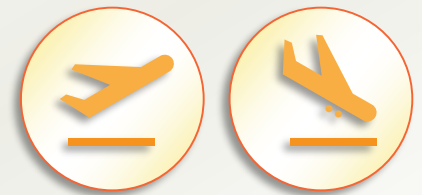
# Temporary recommendation: WHO does not recommend requirements of proof of vaccination for travel

- Following advice of the **International Health Regulation (IHR) Emergency Committee** at its 6th meeting on 14th January 2021, WHO issues a **temporary recommendation** to Member States:

## Temporary recommendation

*At the present time, do not introduce requirements of proof of vaccination or immunity for international travel as a condition of entry as there are still critical unknowns regarding the efficacy of vaccination in reducing transmission and limited availability of vaccines.*

**Proof of vaccination should not exempt international travellers from complying with other travel risk-reduction measures.**

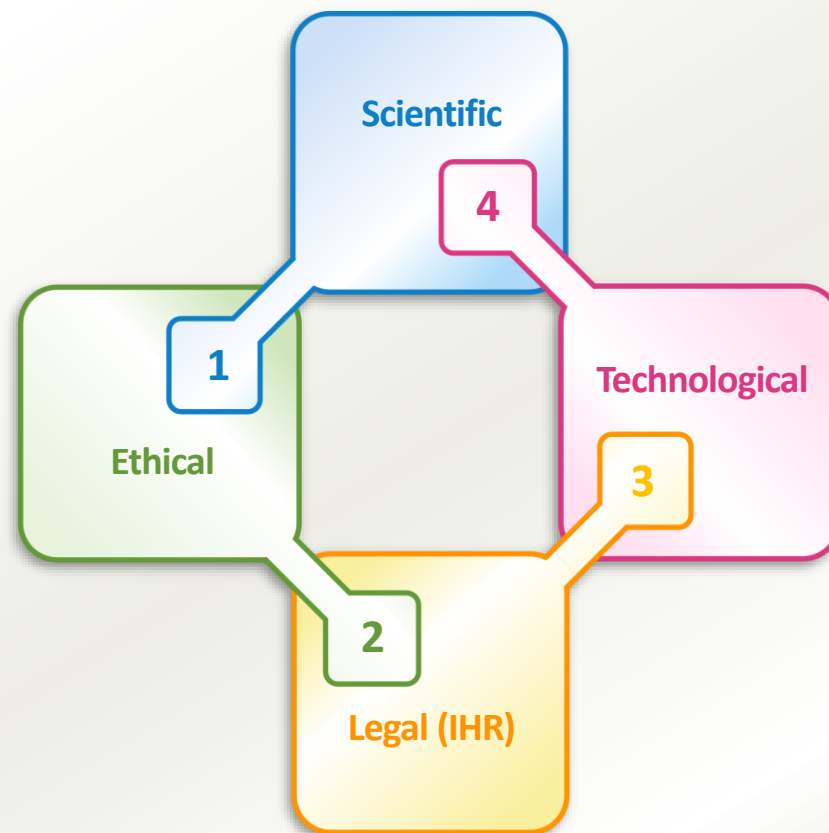


- Temporary recommendations are to be revised in 3 months** if not sooner; taking into account advice from the IHR Emergency Committee and the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE)

# Four considerations that inform the WHO's interim policy position

- WHO's interim policy position **regarding the introduction of requirements for proof of COVID-19 vaccination** for outgoing or incoming international travellers takes into account scientific, ethical, legal and technological considerations
- These considerations underpin WHO's position that at the present time, **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**

**The policy position will be reviewed taking into account advice from the Emergency Committee and SAGE**

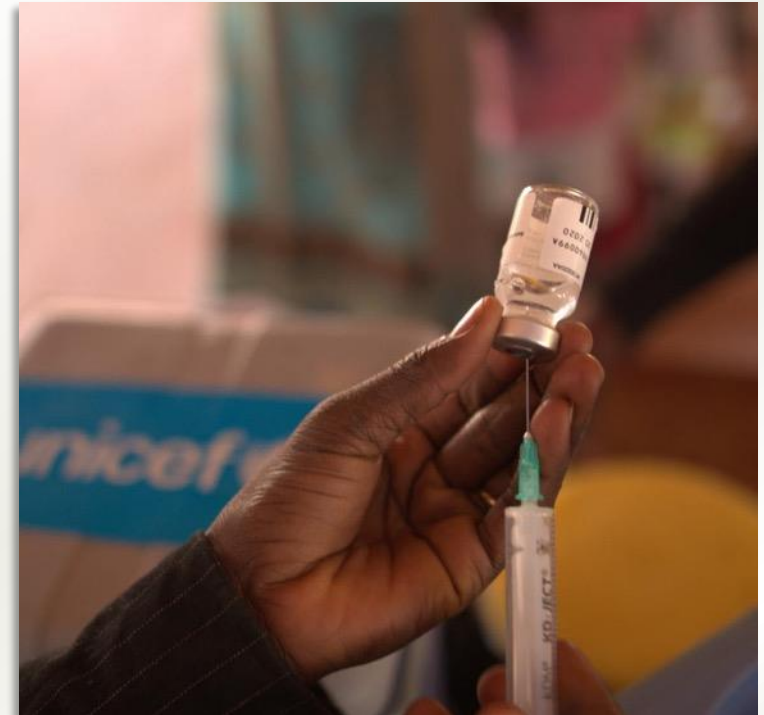


<https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/interim-position-paper-considerations-regarding-proof-of-covid-19-vaccination-for-international-travellers>



# Scientific considerations around proof of vaccination and international travel

- The following elements are still being studied, as more evidence emerges WHO's advice may be revised:
  - **Efficacy** of vaccines in limiting SARS-CoV-2 transmission, including for variants of SARS-CoV-2
  - **Duration** of protection
  - **Timing of booster** dose
  - Protection of vaccines against **asymptomatic infection**
  - **Timing of vaccination** before travel
  - Possible exemption of people who have antibodies



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# Ethical considerations around proof of vaccination and international travel

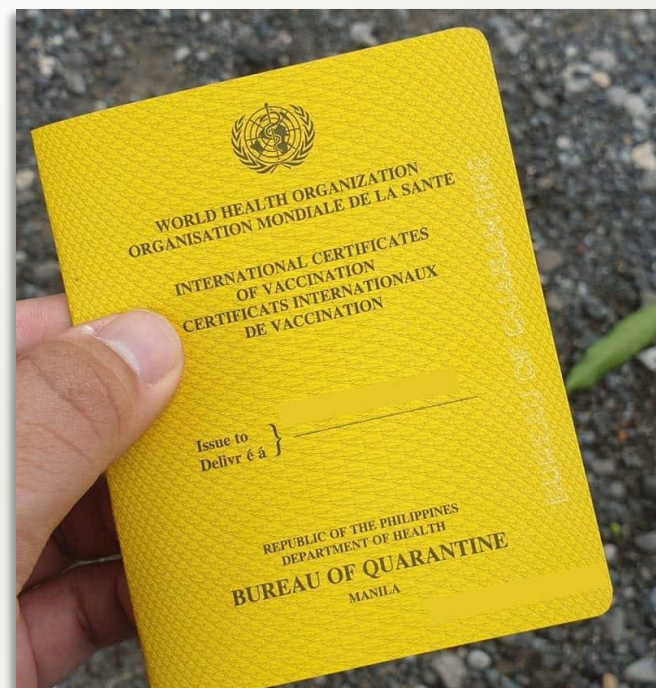
- **Vaccines are not yet universally available** and access to COVID-19 vaccines is currently limited, particularly in low-income countries
- Proof of COVID-19 vaccination for international travel as a condition for departure or entry could result in travellers from high income countries enjoy privileges that citizens from low-income countries would not be able to enjoy
- Preferential vaccination of travellers could also result in inadequate supplies of vaccines for populations considered at high risk of severe COVID-19
- Countries may consider the recommendations issued by WHO SAGE on immunization to maximize public health impact when vaccine supplies are limited<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> [WHO SAGE Roadmap for Prioritizing Uses of COVID-19 Vaccines in the context of limited supply](#)

# IHR considerations around proof of vaccination for international travel

- There are several mechanisms to enable countries to introduce proof of COVID-19 vaccination should the requirement of proof of COVID-19 vaccination for international travelers be introduced in the future:
  - **Temporary Recommendations from an Emergency Committee**  
(Currently, WHO Polio Emergency Committee issues temporary recommendations allowing certain affected countries to require proof of polio vaccination for international travelers)
  - **Standing Recommendations from a review committee** comprised of experts from Member States\*
  - **Possibility for amendment of Annex 7 of the IHR** to include COVID-19 as a disease for which countries may introduce vaccination requirements for international travel (as is currently for yellow fever)\*
- **Vaccines must be approved by WHO and be universally available**
- **Proof of vaccination** for international travellers should be recorded in the **International Certificate for Vaccines and Prophylaxis**



Sample of a polio vaccination certificate  
Photo: Cedric Valera

\* Requires World Health Assembly (WHA) endorsement

# Technological considerations around proof of vaccination and international travel

- Should a requirement of proof of COVID-19 vaccination for international travelers be introduced in the future, then the recording of proof of vaccination should be based on **the following key design principles**:
  - Equitable
  - Accessible
  - Scalable, flexible and sustainable
  - Privacy protecting
- This could include digital formats, but paper certificates should also be supported
- Formats to document proof of vaccination that could be adopted globally are currently being explored



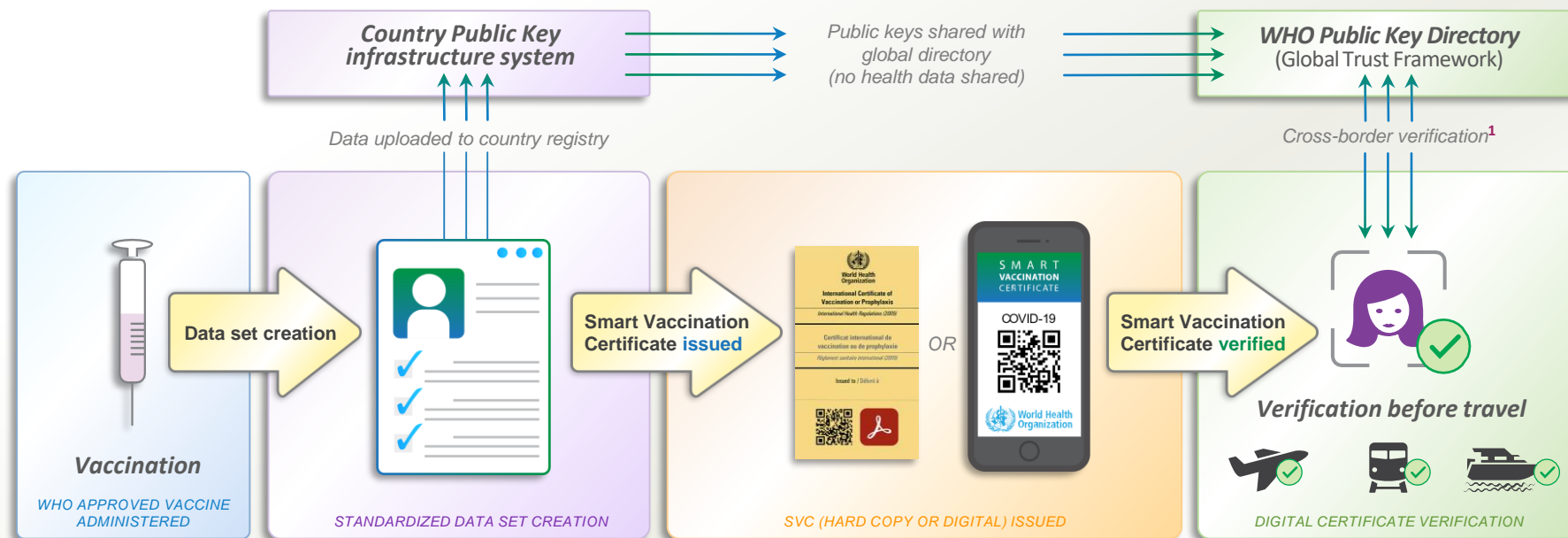
Potential solution for vaccine authentication could be both hardcopy or digital format.

<https://www.who.int/groups/smart-vaccination-certificate-working-group>

# A proposed framework for digital vaccination certificates

- WHO is working with partners to establish a governance framework and specifications for a **digital vaccination certificate** that may be implemented on digital platforms for possible use at national and international levels
- WHO has launched the **Smart Vaccination Certificate Working Group**, a consortium focused on establishing standards for a common architecture for a digital smart vaccination certificate

Figure. Proposed framework for digital Smart Vaccination Certificate (SVC)



<sup>1</sup> Verification will ensure the Smart Vaccination Certificate issued by a country is officially signed by the country's Ministry of Health



# Risk assessment for SARS-CoV-2 testing in the context of international travel

- **International travellers, in general, are not suspected COVID-19 cases.** Therefore, WHO does not recommend healthy travellers as a priority group for SARS-CoV-2 testing
- Many countries test international travellers for SARS-CoV-2 prior to travel, at points of entry or after travel
- Countries that decide to implement COVID-19 testing in the context of international travel as a risk mitigation measure should **ensure that limited resources are not diverted from high-risk groups and high-risk settings** where testing can have a higher impact and drive public health action
- Countries with sufficient resources that decide to implement testing of travellers, should do so **based on risk assessment**



## Risk assessment should consider

- ❖ The local epidemiological situation in departure and destination countries
- ❖ Health system capacities
- ❖ Volume of travel and arrangements for follow-up of incoming travellers who test positive
- ❖ Public health and social measures in departure and destination countries
- ❖ Contextual factors, including economic impact, feasibility of applying measures

[https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci\\_Brief-international\\_travel\\_testing-2020.1](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-international_travel_testing-2020.1)

[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331866/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci\\_Brief-Immunity\\_passport-2020.1-eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331866/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-Immunity_passport-2020.1-eng.pdf)

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331512/WHO-2019-nCoV-POEmgmt-2020.2-eng.pdf>

# Testing for COVID-19 in the context of international travel

- **Testing does not replace public health & social measures** for epidemic control
- **Negative results from pre-travel testing cannot guarantee** that travellers are free from infection at the time of travel
- **Negative results may generate a false sense of security** and disregard the precaution measures during travel and at arrival
- The use of antigen-detecting rapid diagnostic tests (Ag-RDTs) in the healthy travelling population with low expected prevalence of disease is expected to lead to a high proportion of false positive results; thus, **RT-PCR Nucleic Acid Amplification Testing (NAAT) should be used as confirmatory testing**



Source: David L. Ryan / The Boston Globe/Getty Images

[https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci\\_Brief-international\\_travel\\_testing-2020.1](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-international_travel_testing-2020.1)

# Additional WHO resources

- Interim position paper: considerations regarding proof of COVID-19 vaccination for international travellers

<https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/interim-position-paper-considerations-regarding-proof-of-covid-19-vaccination-for-international-travellers>

- Statement on the sixth meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee regarding the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

[https://www.who.int/news/item/15-01-2021-statement-on-the-sixth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-pandemic](https://www.who.int/news/item/15-01-2021-statement-on-the-sixth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-pandemic)

- WHO SAGE roadmap for prioritizing uses of COVID-19 vaccines in the context of limited supply

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-sage-roadmap-for-prioritizing-uses-of-covid-19-vaccines-in-the-context-of-limited-supply>

- Smart Vaccination Certificate Working Group

<https://www.who.int/groups/smart-vaccination-certificate-working-group>

- COVID-19 diagnostic testing in the context of international travel

[https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci\\_Brief-international\\_travel\\_testing-2020.1](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-international_travel_testing-2020.1)

- “Immunity passports” in the context of COVID-19

[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331866/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci\\_Brief-Immunity\\_passport-2020.1-eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331866/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-Immunity_passport-2020.1-eng.pdf)

- Management of ill travellers at Points of Entry (international airports, seaports, and ground crossings) in the context of COVID-19

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331512/WHO-2019-nCoV-POEmgmt-2020.2-eng.pdf>

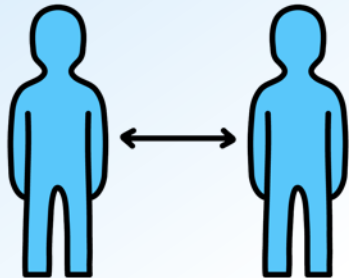
- Considerations for implementing a risk-based approach to international travel in the context of COVID-19

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Risk-based-international-travel-2020.1>



# COVID-19 protective measures

Protect yourself & others



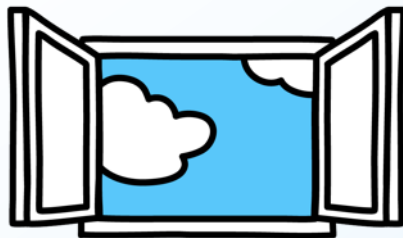
Keep your distance



Wash your hands frequently



Cough & sneeze into your elbow



Ventilate or open windows



Wear a mask



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[www.who.int/epi-win](http://www.who.int/epi-win)