Update on International travel in the context of COVID-19

THE LATEST ON THE COVID-19 GLOBAL SITUATION & VACCINE CERTIFICATION, TESTING AND QUARANTINE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL
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Current global situation

CASES REPORTED TO WHO AS OF 21 July 2021, 10:00 CEST

- Cases: > 190 million
- Deaths: > 4.1 million

Data are incomplete for the current week. Cases depicted by bars; deaths depicted by line.
WHO continues to monitor and share information with States Parties on the travel measures in place.

194 of the 196 WHO Member States have some travel-related measures in place.

The last three months, around 400 travel-related health measures were reported, including: border closures, quarantine, testing, vaccination and travel bans.

Many countries require quarantine upon arrival.

Some countries require a vaccination certificate as a condition for exemption of quarantine or testing.

Figure. Quarantine requirement adapted from the WHO IHR (International Health Regulation) travel measure dashboard.
Worldwide testing and vaccination requirements

- Currently, **hundred forty-three countries** have open borders with limitations
- **Three countries** have their borders completely closed for travellers
- **Five countries** require vaccination as a condition of entry
- **Hundred twenty-three countries** require a test or a vaccination certificate
- **Seventeen countries** exempt travellers from testing if travellers provide a vaccination certificate

Figure 1. Border status adapted from the WHO IHR (International Health Regulation) travel measure dashboard

Figure 2. Test requirement adapted from the WHO IHR (International Health Regulation) travel measure dashboard

week 28 June – 4 July 2021
WHO does not recommend requirements of proof of COVID-19 vaccination as a condition for travel

- Following advice of the International Health Regulation (IHR) Emergency Committee at its 8th meeting, WHO issued the following temporary recommendations to States Parties:

**Temporary recommendations**

- **Continue a risk-based approach to facilitate international travel** and share information with WHO on use of travel measures and their public health rationale\(^1\)

- **Do NOT require proof of vaccination against COVID-19 for international travel** as the only pathway or condition permitting international travel, given limited global access and inequitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines\(^2\)

- **Recognize all COVID-19 vaccines that have received WHO Emergency Use Listing in the context of international travel**\(^3\)

- States Parties are encouraged to include information on COVID-19 status, in accordance with WHO guidance, within the WHO booklet containing the International Certificate of Vaccination and Prophylaxis and to use the digitized version when available\(^4\)

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\(^1\) https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Risk-based-international-travel-2021.1
\(^3\) https://www.who.int/teams/regulation-prequalification/eul/covid-19
A risk-based approach to international travel should be applied in the context of COVID-19

- Countries with sufficient resources that decide to implement testing or quarantine of travellers, should do so based on a risk assessment.

- The presence of SARS-CoV-2 variants will be reflected in the local epidemiology of countries of departure or destination.

- If new SARS-CoV-2 variants appear to be more transmissible, cause more severe disease or have the potential to partially evade natural or vaccine-acquired immunity, national authorities in countries of destination may consider implementing stringent travel-related measures, using a pre-cautionary approach.

- Travel for essential purposes should continue to be prioritized, including emergency and humanitarian missions, travel of essential personnel, repatriations and cargo transport of essential supplies.

Risk assessment should consider:

- The local epidemiological situation in departure and destination countries
- The risk of importing and exporting SARS-CoV-2 (including variants)
- Vaccine-induced and natural immunity
- 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

Testing of international travellers

- International travellers are not COVID-19 cases by default and should not be a priority group for SARS-CoV-2 testing, particularly not in resource-limited contexts.

- The use of antigen-detecting rapid diagnostic tests (Ag-RDTs) in the healthy travelling population with low prevalence of disease is expected to lead to a high proportion of false positive results; If Ag-RDTs are used, **RT-PCR testing should be readily available** for confirmation of potential false positive results.

- **Testing does not replace public health and social measures** for epidemic control.

- **All travellers should continue to adhere to personal and other protective measures** throughout the travel journey.

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

Quarantine of international travellers

• If quarantine of international travellers is implemented in the arrival country, ensure that a risk-based approach is used in decision-making, and that the dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms of travellers are respected

• Policies for testing and quarantine should be regularly reviewed to ensure measures are proportionate and lifted when no longer necessary
Risk mitigation measures that may be implemented

• Travel advise:
  ➢ Confirmed and suspected cases, and their contacts should not travel. Confirmed and suspected cases should be in isolation; and their contacts should be in quarantine
  ➢ Persons with any signs or symptoms compatible with COVID-19 should not travel
  ➢ Persons who have not been fully vaccinated or do not have proof of previous SARS-CoV-2 infection and are at increased risk of developing severe disease, including people 60 years of age or older or those with comorbidities should be advised to postpone travel to areas with community transmission
  ➢ All incoming travellers must follow recommendations and continue to adhere to personal protective measures such as the use of masks and physical distancing both during travel and at point of entry
Communicating with the public about travel-related measures

- It is essential to communicate to travellers in advance of their trip to help them with personal planning.

- Communication on travel guidance should include information on:
  - travel-related measures or temporary restrictions and their rationales
  - recommendations on who can travel
  - public health and social measures at countries of destination
  - the latest COVID-19 situation at the destination, including circulation of SARS-CoV-2 variants
  - how to seek medical care if needed at the countries of destination
  - the potential risk of travel and the measures required to reduce it, including hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, maintaining physical distance and use of a mask as appropriate

- Messages should be consistent, in appropriate languages and accompanied by easy-to-understand images to provide tailored advice and build trust.

- Messages should aim to increase compliance with health advice and prevent the spread of false information or rumours.
Recommendations on the use of certificates of COVID-19 status, including vaccination certificates, for international travel

- **Proof of COVID-19 vaccination should not be required as a condition** for entry or exit.

- Exemptions to testing and/or quarantine requirements may be provided to travellers who:
  - are **fully vaccinated** at least 2 weeks prior to travelling, with COVID-19 vaccines that are WHO EUL-listed or approved by a stringent regulatory authority.
  - had previous **SARS-CoV-2 infection** confirmed by RT-PCR within 6 months prior to travelling and are no longer infectious.

- Alternatives should be offered for travellers who are unvaccinated or do not have proof of previous infection (e.g. via access to testing).

- Consider recording proof of COVID-19 vaccination in the [International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP)](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Policy-Brief-Risk-based-international-travel-2021.1). National authorities may also use other certificates of COVID-19 health status, some in digital format, as recommended by regional or global intergovernmental bodies. However, such proof must not be used as a requirement for entry or exit.
## WHO resources

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

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

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

- WHO regulation and prequalification: COVID-19 vaccines
  [https://www.who.int/teams/regulation-prequalification/eul/covid-19](https://www.who.int/teams/regulation-prequalification/eul/covid-19)

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

- Evidence review: Public health measures in the aviation sector in the context of COVID-19

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

- COVID-19: Travel advice for the general public
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