REPORT: EU DIGITAL COVID CERTIFICATE

What you need to know

June 2021

Background

The European Union is introducing the EU Digital COVID Certificate to facilitate the safe free movement of EU citizens within the EU during the pandemic.[1] EU Member States have already started issuing and using the certificate, although it officially launches on July 1, 2021. At this stage, regulations support the use of the new certificates for 12 months, i.e. until June 20, 2022.

The basics

It's up to national authorities to issue the certificates to their citizens and residents, including foreign nationals. The certificates will share a common design across all EU member states. They could be issued by health authorities, through eHealth portals or by testing centers. For example, an individual may automatically be issued with an EU Digital COVID Certificate when they are vaccinated. Vaccination certificates are issued regardless of the type of vaccination received. Anyone who has already been vaccinated will need to request the new EU Digital COVID Certificate retrospectively.

The digital version can be stored on a mobile device, although a paper version will also be available.

The EU Digital COVID Certificate may be issued to all EU citizens and their family members, and to non-EU nationals legally living in a Member State and who have the right to travel to other Member States.

Helping free movement

So that travel restrictions may be lifted in a coordinated manner, all EU Member States must accept the EU Digital COVID Certificate. Certificate holders will be exempt from any restrictions on free movement, although countries may retain some restrictions if justified to safeguard public health. For example, this may be necessary to combat the emergence of a new COVID-19 variant. In such an instance, the Member State must notify the European Commission and all other Member States.

The EU Digital COVID Certificate will be used by all 27 EU Member State, while non-EU countries Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland may also participate.

What is the EU Digital COVID Certificate?

The certificate provides digital evidence that a person has either:

- Been fully-vaccinated against COVID-19
- Received a negative test result
- Recovered from COVID-19

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[1] European Commission, EU Digital COVID Certificate

Key features

- Available in paper or digital format
- Uses a QR code for sharing essential information
- QR codes includes a digital signature to authenticate the certificate
- Free of charge
- In national language and in English
- Safe and secure
- Valid in all EU countries

How it works

When traveling within the EU, EU citizens should carry the certificate with them, either in digital or paper format. When crossing a border, the authorities scan the QR code on the certificate, its digital signature is verified, authenticating the certificate. Each organization that issues the certificate has its own digital signature key, and these are stored in a secure database in each country.

Using a gateway created by the European Commission, certificate signatures can be verified across the EU. The personal data of the certificate holder is not shared during this process.

The QR code will show if the holder has been vaccinated, has a negative test result, or has previously recovered from COVID-19. It is up to individual Member States to decide whether a vaccination certificate is accepted after one dose or after full-vaccination.

Personal data

The certificate contains certain key information, including name, date of birth, date certificate was issued, relevant information about vaccination, testing or recovery, and a unique identifier.[2]

- Vaccination certificate: vaccine type and manufacturer, number of doses received, date of vaccination

- Test certificate: type of test, date and time of test, place and result

- Recovery certificate: date of positive test result, validity period

This information remains on the certificate and is not stored or retained whenever a Member State verifies the certificate.

For verification purposes, Member States may only check the validity and authenticity of the certificate. All health data remains with the issuing Member State.

Interoperability

Interoperability is achieved by standardizing vaccination, test and recovery certificates across the EU according to agreed policies, rules and specifications. Any certificate issued in one Member State should therefore be verifiable in another Member State.

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[2] European Commission – EU Digital COVID Certificate Q&A

Non-EU countries

The European Commission is keen for non-EU countries to recognize the EU Digital COVID Certificate as they lift restrictions on non-essential travel. Similarly, it is open to recognizing certificates issued by non-EU countries, as long as they meet quality standards and are interoperable with the EU scheme.

Non-EU nationals traveling to the EU

Where the European Commission is satisfied that a non-EU country is issuing certificates in compliance with standards and systems interoperable with the EU scheme, then it may allow these certificates to be used under the same conditions as the EU Digital COVID Certificate.

It has also been suggested that the European Commission will at some stage issue EU Digital COVID Certificates to travelers from non-EU countries so that they can enter and travel around the EU.[3] At this stage it's unclear how this would work and when it would be implemented, and so travelers arriving from non-EU countries may need to use some other digital health pass, as long as it is approved by the European Commission, or rely on paper copies of their vaccination, test result and COVID-19 recovery certificates.

While the European Commission would prefer only vaccines with EU-wide authorization to be accepted (Comirnaty (BioNTech/Pfizer), Moderna, Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca) and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) have been approved by the European Medicine Agency), individual Member States can decide to accept other vaccines approved by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Note

The information presented in this report represents the latest view as at June 22, 2021. We have carefully researched and checked the information contained. However, we do not guarantee or warrant the correctness, completeness or topicality of this article and do not accept any liability for any damage or loss as a result of the use of the information contained within this article.

Do you have questions or comments regarding this report?
Please email mike.eggleton@bcdtravel.co.uk to share your thoughts.

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[3] Schengen Visa Info, June 8, 2021