



# PERSPECTIVES



by **Rinaldo S. Brutoco**

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## Have Vaccine Passport, Will...

### *The Liberating Idea that Will Get Us Back Out There!*

At the very least, traveling will be a lot easier and safer with your “soon to be issued” vaccine passport. Crystal Cruises has already announced it will not accommodate any future passengers who cannot provide proof of vaccination at the time of departure. *And*, even then you also have to provide a current negative Covid-19 test at the time of departure as well. It's too late to ask *if* we are moving into a world requiring vaccination documentation—we are! The question is how soon we'll have one or more vaccination “passports” (let's hope for an eventual international one so we don't require a separate one for each country), what forms the passport will take, and what safeguards we need to take to avoid potential pitfalls.

You can be certain that many businesses, not just Crystal Cruises, will be clamoring for the creation of a vaccination document system as a way to protect their customers, employees (and themselves), as well as to shield themselves against liability. As clear from Crystal's statement below, there is no question they will turn you down as a customer if you can't get vaccinated. Period. To quote their website's answer to a question about what happens to a reservation if the guest can't get a Covid-19 vaccine for medical or other personal reasons:

“We understand that receiving a COVID-19 vaccine may not be a possibility for some guests because of medical restrictions or other personal reasons. While we value each of our loyal guests, *Crystal is responsible for the collective safety and wellbeing of all who sail aboard our vessels and therefore, at this time, we are unable to accommodate any guest who cannot be vaccinated* (emphasis supplied)”.

In a similar vein, UAE's Emirates and Etihad Airways intend to start using a digital vaccine travel pass in the next few weeks so citizens can travel with comfort and certainty.

It's not just cruise lines or airlines that will be requiring a vaccine passport. Take a look at what Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission (the EU's highest office), said two weeks ago:

“We'll present this month a legislative proposal for a Digital Green Pass. The aim is to provide:

- Proof that a person has been vaccinated
- Results of tests for those who couldn't get a vaccination; and,
- Info on COVID recovery.”

Similarly, the Danish government says they will be rolling out a digital vaccine passport “in the next three to four months.”

In our own country, the “first shoe dropped” when **President Biden** issued an Executive Order aimed at reducing the pandemic's spread which instructs all government agencies to “assess the feasibility” of linking digital versions of vaccination documents.

Some of you already know Israel is the first country in the world to adopt this type of system. You can't attend a sporting event, a concert, or even go to a movie unless you have an Israeli “Vaccine Passport”. Overwhelming majorities in Israel like the idea and are celebrating the newfound freedom it has brought them. As Israel's leaders and citizens know, if we want to gather in large groups without masks, we all have to take steps to reduce the background rate of infection. That means we must get vaccinated and only interact with others who also received a vaccine. Several European countries have also begun developing an Israeli-type public health document. You should expect to see them rolling out in the next couple of calendar quarters. We're only writing about a *public health document*, and they've been around for more than a century.

Dr. **John Torres**, an NBC medical contributor and an instructor for NATO Special Forces, travels frequently to Brussels and other countries. He observed on March 14th that he has long held a “yellow card” certification of vaccination against yellow fever attached to his passport. He even published an image of it. To visit any one of sixteen countries that currently require that health document in order to enter, Mr. Torres has to have this card.

It is not a controversial document.

You don't have to get vaccinated. No one is forcing you to. On the other hand, people who have been vaccinated have good reason to maintain social distancing and masking measures unless they are interacting only with others in public who have also received a vaccination. Why?

We all have a vested interest in reducing the background rate of infection. The more people who have the virus, the more it will mutate. That's the nature of evolutionary biology and *no amount of politics by Governor Greg Abbott of Texas or any other politician will change that*. Every new mutation incubated in the unvaccinated makes it that much more likely that we will all have to be re-vaccinated against those mutant strains if they evolve resistance to existing vaccines.

What's the downside of a Vaccine Passport? Many people believe this sort of public health document could morph into a broader health record which could somehow become a "threat" to individual privacy. Just for the record, privacy in the internet age is not even an option. Everything known anywhere, you can assume, will eventually be known everywhere. The Centers for Disease Control has a record of your vaccination. In fact, the Russians have probably already hacked it when they hit the US Government almost nine months ago.

So, stop worrying about who might want to have your medical information and begin to think creatively about how to have our extensive, and very effective, HIPAA laws enforced with regard to vaccine passports the way they are for all of our other medical records. We definitely can manage the downside, and the upside is really liberating.

If we can get this virus pushed backed to insignificance, we'll all breathe much more easily and be much happier.

By the way, the Passport should be electronic (IBM is creating one using blockchain technology for privacy protection). We'll need to easily be able to update the vaccine information in the future and track who has received which vaccine in a world where more than one will be available.

So... yes, you will have a Vaccine Passport in the very near future. The alternative is you'll find yourself unable to go to movies, have dinner out (shouldn't a theater or restaurant owner *want* to protect their employees?), fly on an airplane, take an ocean cruise, or visit any of the many countries that will require it for admittance. And yes, that Vaccine Passport will be your friend in many ways. It will, in many ways, set you free.

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