

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.

As of May 6, 2021, almost **33%** of the adult population in the United States has been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Consequently, a number of states have begun relaxing their COVID-19 restrictions such as mask mandates. With states beginning their transitions back to normalcy, questions surrounding the use of a vaccine passport have started to emerge. So, what is a vaccine passport, and under the U.S. Constitution, who has the power to govern its use?

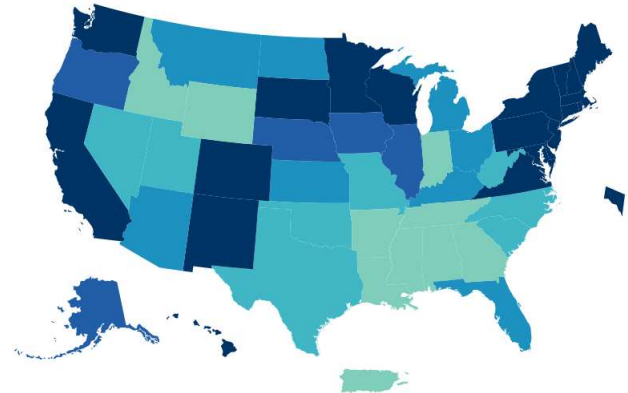
Think of a vaccine passport like a **country’s passport**, which allows its citizens to travel internationally. The difference here is a **vaccine passport** would be an add-on to show proof that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19; it might be required to allow entrance into theme parks and sporting events within a state or the United States itself. It most likely will be shown in hard copy or in digital formats.

The U.S. State Department has the power to establish requirements for international travel to and from the United States, and the Biden Administration is likely to require use of a vaccine passport for international travel to the United States. At the same time, many **countries and even cruise lines** have already stated that vaccine passports will be required for entry or boarding.

Although many people are just hearing the term ‘vaccine passport’ due to the current pandemic, the debate surrounding the use of a vaccine passport predates this pandemic by 123 years! In **1897**, a global debate surrounded the use of a plague vaccine and having to show proof of receiving it to travel to certain countries. Currently, the **World Health Organization** has a form that shows **proof of vaccination** against Yellow Fever. This ‘vaccine passport’ allows international travelers entry into countries that require this proof. The concept of a vaccine passport, then, is not new when it comes to international travel.

COVID-19 Vaccinations in the United States from May 6, 2021

Total Doses Administered Reported to the CDC by State/Territory and for Select Federal Entities per 100,000 of the Total Population



- Territories
- GU
 - AS
 - RP
 - FM
 - MP
 - MH
 - VI
- Federal Entities
- BoP
 - DoD
 - IHS
 - VHA

* Data for Federal Entities are presented here and are also incorporated into the respective jurisdictional totals



Where it is new is in its application to domestic travel. Under the “commerce clause,” the federal government has the authority to regulate domestic travel, so requiring use of a vaccine passport to access public transportation is something the federal government can require.

However it is important to note that the Biden Administration has made it clear that vaccine passports are “not something that is going to be conducted, reviewed, or overseen by the federal government.”

Instead, the Biden Administration is taking on a coordinating role by working with companies and agencies that are developing vaccine passport processes and guidelines for state implementation.

Because there are no national standards governing this process, at least not yet, **some states** have taken steps to require proof of vaccination to engage in public events, while others have prohibited it. These differences in approaches are not shocking. After all, how the states govern internally is left to their discretion, and since this is not a power delegated to the federal government or denied to the states under the Tenth Amendment, a common application of the vaccine passport domestically may prove challenging under the **auspices** of federalism.

To Think and To Do: Given that some states support vaccine passports and some states do not, how could different state rules regarding proof of vaccination impact travel from one state to another? How might differences in how the U.S. approaches the concept of vaccine passports impact the ways in which other countries engage with Americans?

Learn MORE about the vaccine passports.

- [Key Questions about COVID-19 Vaccine Passports and the U.S.](#), from the Kaiser Family Foundation
- [The European Union ‘Digital Green Certificate’](#), from the European Commission
- [How to Get a Vaccine Passport for International Travel](#), from Afar



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