

Which Provinces and Territories have Vaccine Passports?

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Should there be a system that lets fully vaccinated people move around their community, Canada, and other countries? It's a simple question, but the answer is complicated because of logistics (how will it be done?) and ethics (is it fair to ask people?). This system is referred to as a "vaccine passport", which is a paper or virtual document that people carry to show proof of vaccination against COVID-19.

This past Wednesday, Canada's Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino announced that, starting in the "early fall", fully vaccinated Canadians will be able to get a government document with their vaccination information on it, including the type of vaccine(s) they got, the dates they got them, and where they got them.* This document is for international travel, but it can be used within provinces and territories if those governments choose to do so.*

The provinces and territories have diverse opinions on whether or not they'll use vaccine passports on a local level. Some governments have already taken initiative and started using them, while others think that the very idea of them is wrong.* This article will briefly share what the provinces and territories are doing, or not doing. They are in alphabetical order.

Alberta

On July 12, Premier Jason Kenney said that the province won't issue or accept vaccine passports, stating "I believe they would in principle contravene the Health Information Act and also possibly the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act."*

British Columbia

This province also doesn't have a vaccine passport program in place, but when speaking on the topic, Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bonnie Henry remarked that "anything is on the table."* "What we have said is we will not be denying people essential services based on their vaccination status," she affirmed.*

Manitoba

Manitoba has had a proof-of-vaccination card program since June.* People are eligible for this card when they are fully vaccinated and if they have a provincial health card.*

Having a card allows people "to skip the mandatory quarantine when returning to the province from international travel and helps with those wishing to visit a loved one in

long-term care. The passports are also used for access to sporting events, restaurants, bars, and any business that wants to see vaccine proof before entry.”*

New Brunswick

In July, Health Minister Dorothy Shephard said that the province has no plans to bring in a vaccine passport.* Instead, travellers can use the paper or online vaccination receipt that they got when they were vaccinated.*

Newfoundland and Labrador

This province doesn’t have a vaccine passport program in place, and Information and Privacy Commissioner Michael Harvey has said that “asking people to reveal their health information in exchange for access to a premises or even the province or country... is a lot to ask.”* At the same time, he also acknowledged that a program like this could offer a substantial public benefit, but that benefit should be balanced against people’s right to privacy.*

Northwest Territories

According to the website of the Government of Northwest Territories, “The NWT will comply with Federal requirements once decided – but it is not up to us to decide what is needed or accepted across the country.”* The government is offering an Immunization Card (which “is not considered an official record to be used as proof for travel and other purposes”), and residents also have “the option to request your vaccine record if absolutely required for employment or other reasons.”*

Nova Scotia

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Robert Strang, said that Nova Scotia has not made a decision on this topic, and they are still considering it.* He said, “I remain concerned that if not done very thoughtfully, something like a vaccine passport will further marginalize populations that are already marginalized in our communities,” and he mentioned that any proof of vaccination would have to be designed in way that makes it difficult to forge.*

Nunavut

This territory doesn’t have a vaccine passport program in place, and the government doesn’t have any plans to create one.* According to CTV News, “The Government of Nunavut has said that any vaccine passports would happen at the federal level.”*

Ontario

Currently, there isn’t a vaccine passport program, but there is an ongoing debate about whether the province should have one. In July, Ontario’s COVID-19 Science Advisory Table published a 21-page document with recommendations on a vaccination certification program.* The table says that a vaccine certificate isn’t the same thing as a vaccine passport

because a passport allows you to travel internationally while a certificate would allow you to go places locally.*

According to the table, vaccine certificates could be useful in reopening higher-risk settings in the province sooner or at an increased capacity.* “Higher-risk settings” refers to indoor dining, bars, gyms, cultural and sports events.* The document specifies that certain spaces, such as essential and low-risk settings, should not require any sort of certification.*

Scientific Director Dr. Peter Jüni stated that a vaccine certification program could help the province in “[finding] the solution that would help us if the situation gets worse again, to keep the economy and the society open, and just make sure that discretionary spaces such as chains, indoor dining cinema halls ... remain safe and don’t contribute to outbreaks.”*

The document says: “Given the anticipated seasonality of [COVID-19], as well as the possibility of additional variants of concern, establishing ... [a] COVID-19 vaccine certification may be useful if public health measures need to be reintroduced.”*

Premier Doug Ford is strongly against the idea of a vaccine passport.* In July, he said “The answer is no, we’re not gonna do it. We’re not gonna have a split society.”* In contrast, Toronto Mayor John Tory has called for the implementation of a vaccine certification program*, and the Toronto Region Board of Trade supports the idea as well.*

A few days ago, this past Wednesday, the Ontario Liberals joined the opposition New Democratic Party to ask the provincial government to start using a vaccine certification system and make COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for healthcare and education workers.*

Prince Edward Island

Unlike some provinces that are only interested in vaccine passports for international or local travel, PEI has a form of a vaccine passport for people who are travelling to other provinces within Canada.* Depending on the area, you are eligible for a “PEI Pass” if you are partially or fully vaccinated.*

Quebec

Last Thursday, Quebec announced it would start to use vaccine passports on the local level, which will allow vaccinated residents to visit non-essential businesses.* Less than a week later, someone has already tried to bribe a healthcare worker at a vaccination clinic to give them a vaccine passport.*

Quebec decided to use vaccine passports in order to prevent the Delta variant from causing a fourth wave.* The health ministry confirmed that from July 1 to 24, “unvaccinated or partially vaccinated Quebecers accounted for 92% of new COVID-19 cases.”*

Saskatchewan

This province is in the process of developing a type of vaccine passports for international travel, but Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe says that this documentation won't be used to determine if people can go to work or community events.*

Yukon

Currently, this territory doesn't have plans for a vaccine passport program. In a statement released in May, the Yukon's Privacy Commissioner Diane McLeod-McKay insisted that "vaccine passports must safeguard privacy and should only be used for public health measures" and "[t]hey should also incorporate privacy best practices in order to achieve the highest level of privacy protection commensurate with the sensitivity of the personal health information."*

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at www.ontario.ca/coronavirus. Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675