Key Considerations on
COVID-19 Testing Protocols and Health Identification
for International Travel

February 2021

Disclaimer

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on people's lives and on the economy in general, air transport not being the exception.

At the Asia-Pacific and Middle East level, different national approaches to travel bans, restrictions, testing, quarantines and vaccination have led to unilateral and uncoordinated measures that jeopardise the recovery of the air transport sector.

Fighting COVID-19 while preserving the economy requires a multi-layered outlook. Asia-Pacific and Middle East airports have – amongst other measures - ensured the cleaning & disinfection and the optimisation of heating, ventilation & air conditioning in their premises, enforced the use of masks and physical distancing, provided testing facilities and supported the distribution of vaccines. In spite of all those efforts and the close cooperation with their national authorities, Asia-Pacific and Middle East airports lost about 59% and 70% of their traffic in 2020 respectively as compared to 2019 and saw their revenues fall by around USD 39 billion collectively.

While States consider the different solutions to safely reopen borders, bringing back travel and tourism and all the benefits they entail, passengers look forward to travelling again in safety and confidence. The beginning of mass COVID-19 vaccination is the first step in the path to recovery.

The rapid deployment of vaccines is a very important progress for the sector, but the aviation industry simply cannot afford to wait until they become available worldwide. Just as quarantine effectively halted the industry, a universal requirement for vaccines could jeopardize the progressive recovery of the sector, because dependent on a very large uptake of vaccines across all States. WHO, in its interim position paper "*considerations regarding proof of COVID-19 vaccination for international travellers*"[1] states that national authorities and conveyance operators should not introduce requirements of proof of COVID-19 vaccination for international travel as a condition for departure or entry, given that there are still critical unknowns regarding the efficacy of vaccination in reducing transmission and limited availability of vaccines. Without excluding that this position may be reviewed in the future as evidence about existing and new COVID-19 vaccination is compiled, during the transition period, tests continue to be largely applied among the travel-risk reduction measures and it may continue to play an important role even when vaccination will have reached high level of distribution.

At global level, ICAO is looking at how a mutually recognised testing certificate might be developed based on its expertise on passports and visa documentation, set out in Annex 9 to the Chicago Convention, and WHO has established a Smart Vaccination Certificate Working Group to inform the development of specifications and guidance for using digital technologies for documenting vaccination status. The guidance issued by this group will include a required minimum data set, standards for interoperability and recommended governance, digital functionality and systems architecture along the lines of a more secure version of the yellow fever certificate which is specified in the International Health Regulations 2005.

For all these reasons, the air transport industry needs a proactive, consistent and coordinated approach to elaborate integrated, interoperable, flexible and scalable solutions to adapt to international standards under development.

The goal of this document is to contribute to the current discussion on testing and health identification and present the view of the airport industry on some criteria that should be duly considered by policy makers at national and regional level.

---

[1] https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/interim-position-paper-considerations-regarding-proof-of-covid-19-vaccination-for-international-travellers

1) TESTING AT AIRPORTS

ACI Asia-Pacific encourages the use of robust testing regimes as one layer of public health security, whenever appropriate and justified to mitigate the risk of transmission. Airports continue their proactive efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the health, safety, and security of the traveling public and airport workers. Travelers must also be encouraged to practice responsible public health hygiene such as wearing a face covering, physical distancing when possible, and washing hands frequently.

- ✓ **Testing standards:** States should embrace a common standard of specificity and sensitivity based on the ICAO and WHO recommendations. While leaving the selection of acceptable tests (molecular, antigen, or another type of test) and timeframe to governments, airports believe that guidelines should be flexible enough to adapt to advancing technology.

- ✓ **Pre-departure testing:** Whenever required and justified, ACI Asia-Pacific supports pre-departure testing and encourage off-airport testing solutions but allow for the need to make accommodations necessary for on-airport testing solutions, including same-day rapid testing at the airport through testing centers.

- ✓ **Testing upon arrival:** When administering rapid testing upon arrival is required by the State, ACI Asia-Pacific encourages governments to take into consideration the location of testing site, transport to the testing site, and appropriate hold room as passengers await results. Airports also encourage local health authorities to maintain a presence onsite and guide secondary screening.

- ✓ **Tracking:** ACI Asia-Pacific encourages to use a common tracking system for test certification.

- ✓ **Testing/Vaccine validation through health-passes:** The validation measure and potential verification of certified labs is competence of governments and other stakeholders. ACI Asia-Pacific does, however, encourage governments and stakeholders to agree to a common process for verification, whether electronically or through paperwork, and informed of enforcement policies if a traveller does not present a valid certificate. ACI Asia-Pacific suggests, whenever possible, the use of either pre-clearance or digital passport (see chapter 2). ACI Asia-Pacific also encourages governments and stakeholders to make passengers aware of the validation requirement and process early in the booking process.

- ✓ **Resource planning and cost for testing:** Resources necessary to operate testing sites should be provided by the competent authority. In addition, based on the WHO's International Health Regulations (IHR), the cost of health measures, including testing, should not be charged to travellers and should be borne by the government, to the extent possible. In any case, planning for testing operations should be done in consultation with airports in order to ensure the airport has resources to provide any necessary support. Airports are also concerned that governments and testing operators take into consideration the strain on overall airport operations as passenger volume increases. Social distancing at airports to undertake such operations should be ensured to the extent possible.

✓ **Location of test sites**: There are various considerations to be taken into account when operators select a location, whether it be in the public area or pre-security, post-security or out of the terminal such as an outdoor testing site. Governments should keep in mind that no one model will fit each airport, and guidelines should be flexible enough to allow for adaptation and taking into account that airports will need to continue to facilitate high-volume passenger processing.

✓ **Positive test protocols**: Airports should be included in the establishment of positive test protocols in order to provide insight as to how each airport functions. Airports encourage local health authorities to guide protocols for handling positive test cases at the airport.

✓ **Stakeholders' collaboration**: Airports should work with airlines and other relevant stakeholders to promote advance communication to travellers regarding testing protocols and potential impact on their arrival at the airport. This communication will allow travellers to plan accordingly for arrival to the airport property and account for additional wait times testing could add to the pre-screening process at the airport. Airports should also collaborate with government partners at all levels to coordinate advance communication regarding testing requirements as well as consequence management of positive test results throughout the passenger journey, including before the passenger arrives at the airport.

✓ **Liability and risk management:** Airport management should consult with local legal counsel and risk management professionals to identify and manage potential liability arising out of any testing regime established or permitted by airport management, based on each country's specific laws and requirements. Any testing program should ensure compliance with national health laws, privacy laws, and all airport regulations and policies. Airport management should ensure that the parties involved to develop and follow protocols for confirming eligibility of persons being tested on airport property; conducting the test; waiting for test results; communicating test results to individuals being tested; and communicating positive test results to local health authorities, and the airlines, as appropriate and necessary and in accordance with the privacy protections afforded by applicable national laws. Protocols should also be developed so that individuals who test positive can be isolated, restricted from in-person work (if airport employee) or air travel, and can safely exit airport facilities.

2) "HEALTH PASSES" AT AIRPORTS

For States to lift travel restrictions, passengers may be required in the future to fulfil a series of conditions (for instance a COVID-19 negative test or vaccination if available). In order to prove compliance with these requirements, passengers need to present a valid certificate. Such certificates currently exist in the form of paper documents, PDF documents, emails or SMS that are not secured and can be easily falsified. As these documents are not standardised, they are often difficult to interpret and their reading cannot be automated.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, different providers developed a series of solutions on "health passes"[2]. Due to the number and diversity of the involved stakeholders (international

---

[2] For instance and without being exhaustive: IATA Travel Pass, CERTUS, SITA, Common Pass, DIVOK, AOK Pass, Green Pass, IBM, Microsoft, Apple, Idemia, Airsidemobile, Safe Health systems, The Mayo Clinic.

organisations, States, healthcare providers, laboratories, IT providers, airports, air carriers) several solutions will coexist. The different solutions currently in the market provide notably:

- A list of health/sanitary requirements for travelling
- A list of trusted issuers (accredited providers of testing and/or or vaccination).
- A health pass (this may have different denominations)
- An engine that determines if the holder is eligible or not for travel (ready-to-fly or similar), providing their health status and the applicable rules at departure and/or destination
- A Wallet App (or equivalent) to store and manage the above.

A global and consistent approach should be achieved, under the leadership of ICAO and WHO. At national level, States will play a crucial role in defining what solution(s) will be used domestically and for cross-border travel. Cooperating with the stakeholders involved, including airport operators, will be crucial for ensuring a smooth and safe recovery of traffic.

The air transport industry at national and regional level needs a proactive approach to quick, future-proof solutions, easily integrated, flexible and scalable as to adapt to the international standards to be agreed. These solutions should address some operational and legal challenges related, but not limited to, identity assurance, document forgery, the multiplication of stakeholders, trust and end-to-end assurance, data privacy and ethics, standards and re-use, interoperability and usability.

Scope

A **health pass** constitutes a certificate or credential provided by a certified issuer, proving the holder's health status and allowing them to travel. This certificate may include:
- Passenger's health declaration
- The result of a temperature check
- The result of a COVID-19 test (PCR, antigen, antibody or other)
- A COVID-19 vaccination proof (if available)
- Other relevant information (vaccine exemption, immunity etc)

Such credential should be linked to the holder via an official ID including a series of information, notably:
- Last name
- First name
- Birth date
- Passport or ID number
- Nationality
- Address and contact details

This information should allow the verifier to authenticate the credential and match it with the holder (as it is currently done with electronic passports and boarding passes). The checks of health passes may be performed:
- Before entering the terminal
- At check-in
- At security check
- At border control
- At the boarding gate

Multiple potential points of testing and checks before, during and after the journey
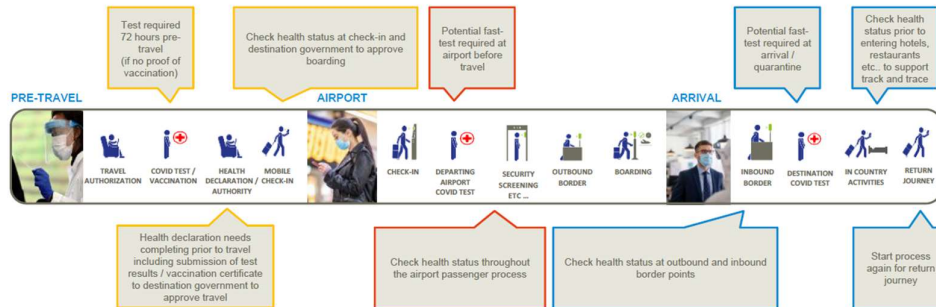
Not every scheme are proposing to work the same way

Infrastructure and staff needs for the deployment of health passes tools at airports

Airport managing bodies, together with the different stakeholders need to define the processes and select the touchpoints where checks and verifications will be made. Due to the different formats of health passes, it will be necessary to deploy the means to read them (manually or automatically). This may be done through:

- Dedicated devices (e.g. smartphones, QR code readers connected to computers) or
- Integration into the existing systems (such as boarding pass or border control readers).

For most solutions, an internet connection may be needed, however, they should also allow off-line work, in case of internet, server or electricity outage. No additional specific infrastructure should be needed.

In terms of staff at check-in, security or border control and/or boarding may need to perform additional checks. Particular attention should be paid to identify the most appropriate area so as to not place further strain on the selected facilitation point.

Requirements for the use of health passes at Asia-Pacific and Middle East airports

Should States decide to require a health pass for passengers to travel, ACI Asia-Pacific consider that they should meet the following requirements:

- ✓ **Interoperability**. As each State may decide on a given solution, it is essential to guarantee the verification of different formats and issuers. For ACI Asia-Pacific, the main question is the interoperability of the different solutions, rather than selecting a single one, ideally applicable to different modes of transport.

- ✓ **Availability**. The use of existing industry platforms will minimise complexity and costs, maximise investments and enable a safe and seamless journey.

- ✓ **Accessibility.** Some travellers are not equipped with digitally-enabled devices and they should not be left aside. Thus, it should be possible to deliver a paper health pass, or to allow passengers to print it. Similarly to boarding passes, health passes should be available in multiple formats (PDF, email, SMS or printed on paper).

- ✓ **Speed**. The verifier should be able to quickly check the authenticity of a health pass. This means that health passes must be machine readable (e.g. with a barcode scanner device) and its checking should be available in the device used for the verification (or the computer linked to it).

- ✓ **Automation**. In addition to the verification of the integrity of the health pass, the verification process should also automatically and seamlessly check that the issuer is legitimate and accredited.

- ✓ **Trustworthiness**. It should be secured and be able to detect counterfeits.

- ✓ **Verifiability**. This should be possible to be done off-line, in case the computer systems or the internet are down for some period of time. The off-line verification is important in order not to stop or delay the verification process in case of connection problems.

- ✓ **Compliance with national regulations on personal data collection and protection**. Checks should be done without the need to access the issuer's database or the holder's health file. This means that the issuance and the verification processes should be totally independent. This is a very important aspect for security and privacy reasons.

- ✓ **Decentralisation**. The emission and the verification should be done in a fully decentralised way, without the need for interconnections between the different stakeholders.

- ✓ **Scalability**. The scalability of the different solutions will need to be carefully assessed, as the number of solutions could be considerable.

- ✓ **Recognition**. Ideally, health passes should be globally accepted and recognised.

###