

IATA says lifting COVID measures is a key motivator of vaccination

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) applauded the growing number of countries making data and evidence-driven decisions to open their borders to vaccinated travelers. The latest data collected by IATA, including its Timatic service, shows that more than 20 countries have fully or partially lifted restrictions for vaccinated travelers.

IATA supports unrestricted access to travel for vaccinated travelers. In cases where vaccination is not possible, access to quarantine-free travel should be provided via COVID-19 testing strategies based on widely available, free-of-charge tests.

Germany is among the latest countries to alleviate quarantine rules for vaccinated travelers. Vaccinated travelers are no longer subject to quarantine measures – with the exception of some high-risk countries. Germany has also removed quarantine requirements for travelers with a negative COVID-19 test result – with the exception of some high-risk countries.

This decision by the German government followed a review of scientific advice from the world-renowned Robert Koch Institute (RKI), which concluded vaccinated travelers are no longer significant in the spread of the disease and do not pose a major risk to its population. Specifically, it stated that vaccination reduces the risk of COVID-19 transmission to levels below the risk of a false negative rapid antigen test.

The implementation of this policy aligns Germany with recommendations from both the European Commission and the European Parliament, based on similar scientific advice from the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC). During interim guidance about the benefits of full vaccination, the ECDC determined “based on the limited evidence available, the likelihood of an infected vaccinated person transmitting the disease is currently assessed to be very low to low.”

Similar conclusions are being reached on the other side of the Atlantic. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) noted that “with a 90% effective vaccine, pre-travel testing, post-travel testing and 7-day self-quarantine provide minimal additional benefit.”

“A safe re-opening of borders to international travel is the goal. Scientific evidence and data such as this presented by RKI, ECDC and USC CDC should be the basis for the decision-making needed to achieve this. There is increasing scientific evidence that vaccination is not only protecting people, but also dramatically reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This is bringing us closer to a world where vaccination and testing enables the freedom to travel without quarantine. Germany and at least 20 other countries have already taken an important step forward in re-opening their borders to vaccinated travelers. These are the best practice examples for others to quickly follow,” says Willie Walsh, Director General, IATA.

An important incentive of vaccination

According to the US CDC, the alleviation of COVID-19 restrictions is a key motivator of vaccination; particularly, in communities where vaccine hesitancy is prevalent. This is an additional and important benefit of restriction-free travel for those vaccinated. IATA polling indicates that 81% of international travelers are willing to get vaccinated in order to be able to travel. Moreover, 74% of people in the same poll agreed that those vaccinated should be able to travel by air without restrictions.

Digital solutions for vaccination/test certificates

The decision by increasing numbers of countries to accept vaccinated travelers without quarantine measures adds pressure for a digital solution to manage vaccine certificates and COVID-19 test results. Paper-based processes could lead to extremely long processing times at check-in and border control. They also open the door to fraud. Digital vaccine/test certificates, coupled with passenger apps such as the IATA Travel Pass, would be needed to manage travel health credentials efficiently and securely during the re-start.

Recent IATA polling shows strong support for a digital solution:

89% supported globally standardized COVID-19 test or vaccination certifications

84% want an app to manage their travel health credentials

“A gap is opening up between countries responding to scientific evidence and those exhibiting a lack of preparation or excessive caution in re-opening borders. Countries that seize the opportunity offered by the increasing numbers of vaccinated travelers can protect their populations and reap an economic reward,” adds Walsh.