

S. Korea opens up to vaccinated Chinese travelers



South Korea's vaccine passport quarantine exclusion program will include those vaccinated with Chinese vaccines Sinopham and Sinovac

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) has now approved Sinopharm and Sinovac, the two Chinese-made vaccines, South Korea recently became the first country globally to allow travelers fully vaccinated with these vaccines to enter the country without the mandatory 14-day quarantine. This will begin on July 1, and will allow for visitors from China as well as other countries where these vaccines were administered.

This quarantine exemption applies to any vaccine approved of by WHO, including Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson (J&J), Moderna, AstraZeneca, Covidshield, Sinopham and Sinovac, as the beginning of the so-called "vaccine passport."

Travelers will still need to be tested before entering the country, and if they come from a country where there is a current outbreak or a new variant, this "vaccine passport" will not apply; they will need to quarantine.

The EU is also launching a vaccine passport as of July 1, whereby fully vaccinated EU members will be able to travel within the European Union. This passport accepts vaccines approved by the EU Medicine Agency, which includes Moderna, AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and J&J, but not Sinopham or Sinovac, at this point.

As Chinese travelers are exceptionally important in South Korea, this is a good step forward, though immunologists remain cautious, especially given the precarious global state with a high number of cases in some countries, and evolving mutations causing new variants.

China is being exceptionally cautious, but is expected to launch some type of vaccine passport by the end of the year, if enough Chinese people can be vaccinated to be considered herd immunity, and the expectation is that more countries around the world will accept Chinese vaccinations as part of their vaccine passport system.