

LETTERS



Vaccine certificate during domestic traveling: a potential initiative to prevent COVID-19 waves in India

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ABSTRACT

India, the second-most populous country in the world, is struggling with the second wave of the COVID-19 triggered by SARS-CoV-2. This letter aims to highlight the necessity of the vaccine certificate during nationwide traveling to prevent further waves of the COVID-19 in the different states of India. Such policies have already been in existence for international travel termed as vaccine passports. The compulsory vaccine certificates need to be in existence to prevent the rapid spread of the COVID-19 as well as the future waves of this pandemic in India. There is an urgent need for Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on preventive measures to control the spread of COVID-19 nationwide by including the vaccine certificate for domestic travel between the cities and states.

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India, the largest manufacturer of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine, struggles with the severe attack of the COVID-19 second wave triggered by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).¹ A total of 23.34 million cases have been reported so far, with a mortality rate of 1.08% (0.25 million deaths).² This letter aims to highlight the necessity of the vaccine certificate during nationwide traveling to prevent further waves of the COVID-19 in the different states of India. Until 13th May 2021, 17.60 million people have been vaccinated in India [Dose I- 13.78 million (9.90% of the total population) and Dose II- 3.82 million (2.74% of the total population)] under the phase-wise vaccination drive.³ From 1st May 2021, all people above the age of 18 years are eligible to get vaccinated in phase 4 (largest phase) of the vaccination drive to control this ongoing pandemic. The Government of India has already given clearance for vaccination of health and frontline workers in phase 1; those above 60 years and above 45 years with comorbidities in phase 2 and; those aged more than 45 years in phase 3 of the vaccination. Vaccine hesitancy has led to low uptake and continues to impact the nationwide covid-19 vaccination program in India.

However, vaccination is not the only solution to prevent the spread of the COVID-19. The Government of India needs to take some strict initiative toward the traveling movements to prevent the subsequent waves of COVID-19 in India. For this, a vaccination certificate must be necessary for traveling between inter-districts and interstates of the nation. Such vaccine certificates could mean that those carrying proof of vaccination might be able to travel freely nationwide. Internationally, Denmark is developing a digital vaccine passport that will facilitate travel, allow privileges, and ease restrictions.⁴ This strategy not only controls the spread of COVID-19; however, it also restricts the

unnecessary movement of the people responsible for spreading this disease.

Since the herd immunity to SARS-CoV-2 is achievable only *via* vaccination, instead of the natural infection, the global efforts should be focused on implementing a vaccination program with a highly efficacious vaccine with efforts to achieve as high coverage as possible.⁵ The COVID-19 vaccine drive in India was launched on the 16th January 2021 with Covaxin and Covishield vaccines, as they are the only vaccines that have received approval from the Central Drugs and Standards Committee (CDSCO). The first group includes healthcare and frontline workers. As per the guidelines, eligible people have to register at Co-WIN or Aarogya Setu application to make an appointment for the vaccination against COVID-19. After successful immunization (2nd dose), all the benefitted members can download their vaccine certificate for print or store it in the cell phones as proof of vaccination. After the first dose, people get a provisional certificate, and after the final dose, the final certificates are issued to the beneficiary. This downloaded certificate after the second dose should be made compulsory for travel across India. This initiative by the government might prevent the nationwide spread of the COVID-19 and spread awareness amongst the people to carry the vaccine certificate to travel across the nation.

Internationally, vaccination certificates are not new as these have already been required for proof of yellow fever vaccination for specified destinations and as an evidence of meningococcal immunization for those traveling to the Hajj.⁴ There are countries such as Belize, Croatia, Ecuador, Estonia, Georgia, Guatemala, Iceland, Montenegro, Poland, Seychelles, and Slovenia, which permit international travelers to enter the country and allow them to avoid mandatory quarantine if

they possess complete certification of vaccination against COVID-19.

In conclusion, the vaccination certificate for COVID-19 should be made compulsory and applicable to all modes of travel, including people entering the state by train, bus, air-plane, waterways, or in private vehicles across the nation. This strategy would help the Government of India in preventing the future waves of the COVID-19 and also help to reduce the cases in ongoing wave i.e., second wave of the pandemic. Current circumstances demand such immediate policies that offer reasonable leeway for balancing the protection of public health with a return to pre-pandemic life.⁶

Authors' contributions

O.P.C. did the ideation, conceptualization, data curation, writing original draft, reviewing, and editing. P.R. executed the conceptualization, writing original draft, reviewing, and editing. I.S. did the reviewing and editing.

Ethical approval

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