

Current Vaccine Passport Rules Across Canada



Ontario, BC, Quebec, Manitoba and Nova Scotia require proof of vaccination to participate in certain public activities.

'Vaccination passport,' a term few of us had ever heard before the pandemic, has suddenly become a topic of overriding national importance. Regrettably, the term is also a major source of confusion and misinformation. Specifically, there are 2 misconceptions making the rounds. The first has to do with what a vaccination passport actually is; the second is the notion that vaccination passports have become the 'law of the land.' Let's see if we can sort things out.

What Vaccination Passports Are

Social distancing remains crucial to containing the spread of coronavirus. However, the COVID-19 vaccines have proven effective in preventing transmission. Today, it's the unvaccinated that comprise most if not all of the new cases. Accordingly, the burden of social distancing and staying at home now falls largely on this group while the vaccinated can once more safely engage in travel and public activity. The public health objective then becomes to keep these groups segregated.

The vaccine passport is one way to exclude the unvaccinated. The literal term 'vaccine passport' refers to a document, card, note or other digital or physical item that's officially accepted as verifying that a person has received the COVID-19 vaccine. Some provincial governments have created or are creating an official card or digital app that individuals must display. But passports can take many forms, including a signed letter from a doctor, certificate from a vaccine provider or even a personal attestation.

Whatever the form, the passport represents the ticket to entry. In the government context, passports may be required for travel or to participate in different forms of non-essential public or social activity, like attending a concert or sporting event. Passports aren't required for essential activities like food shopping or going to a doctor's office.

Passports may also be used in the workplace to limit entry to the vaccinated. Vaccination passports aren't the same thing as mandatory employee vaccination policies. Thus, employers may decide that it's better to encourage rather than require workers to get vaccinated but still require them to produce verification

of their vaccination status as a workplace health and safety measure. Conversely, the passport may also be a way to enforce a mandatory vaccination policy by obligating workers to prove compliance.

The Current State of Canadian COVID-19 Vaccination Passport Laws

The current discussion of vaccination passports focuses largely on the government, rather than the workplace context. The 'law of the land' misconception may derive from the recent decision of the federal government to require vaccination passports for international travel, which notably doesn't apply to non-essential public activity; or it may stem from the new mandatory vaccination policy for federal government employees.

The point is that it's up to each jurisdiction to decide whether to adopt a passport system within its own borders. In other words, there is no 'law of the land' on vaccination passports. There are different rules in different parts of the country. Here's a quick rundown of where things stand in each jurisdiction.

Five provinces have or are in the process of implementing vaccination passport systems for participation in nonessential public activity: Manitoba, Québec, BC, Nova Scotia and Ontario.

In 5 provinces, government leaders have stated that they won't implement a vaccination passport system, except perhaps for international travel: Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan. However, there has been a lot of political pushback on the issue, especially in Alberta.

Although the 3 territories haven't yet taken clear positions on the issue, they have said that they'd follow the federal lead on international travel.