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A global accreditation framework for Covid-19 “vaccination passports” to allow for international travel is something that several health authorities, including Singapore’s, are looking at.

However, this will require a lot more study, given how new the coronavirus is. Questions that need further discussion include the nature of the vaccine, how long immunity would last and if this will apply to recovered individuals.

Currently, the only vaccination certificate applicable for global travel is for yellow fever. The vaccination provides life-long immunity.

This subject of vaccination passports was among the slew of issues discussed on Wednesday at a webinar titled Covid-19 In Asia Pacific – Border Control Policy And The Path To Reopening.

Organised by the National University of Singapore’s (NUS) Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, the webinar convened a panel of seven speakers from around the region. They include Swiss Ambassador to Singapore Fabrice Filliez and the World Health Organisation’s Southeast Asia regional adviser Manisha Shridhar, as well as representatives from New Zealand, Indonesia and Singapore.

Region mulling ‘vaccination passports’ for global travel

Accreditation framework among issues discussed at NUS webinar on Covid-19



Countries will need to work out when border control measures can be lifted and how far they can relax safety restrictions.
TNP FILE PHOTO

Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health dean Teo Yik Ying was the moderator.

A key topic of discussion was how strictly a country should control its borders and how the impact of imported cases on healthcare resources could be managed. To this, the panellists said there is no one-size-fits-all

approach.

Currently, many countries, including Singapore, adopt quarantine measures – the safest and most effective way to detect imported cases. However, given the economic fallout from the strict control of borders globally, countries have sought to take a calibrated approach to eas-

ing restrictions.

Risk assessments need to be carried out, and the panel touched on whether there would be a risk assessment framework to guide countries, regions and the world.

Such a framework would provide a transparent way to make decisions, with clear indicators

of when a country can lift border control measures and the extent of relaxation of safety restrictions.

The key measures that will form the cornerstone during the easing of border control measures include testing: pre-departure testing, testing on arrival, as well as repeated testing.

The panellists said decisions will also have to be made on what kind of tests need to be done – whether to use the gold-standard polymerase chain reaction test, or if countries could tap more advanced technologies, such as breath-analysing tests and rapid antigen tests.

However, it is critical to note that none of these regimes is fool-proof, and safe management measures as well as good contact tracing systems will remain critical in preventing infected cases who have entered the country from spreading the virus within the community, the panellists said.

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