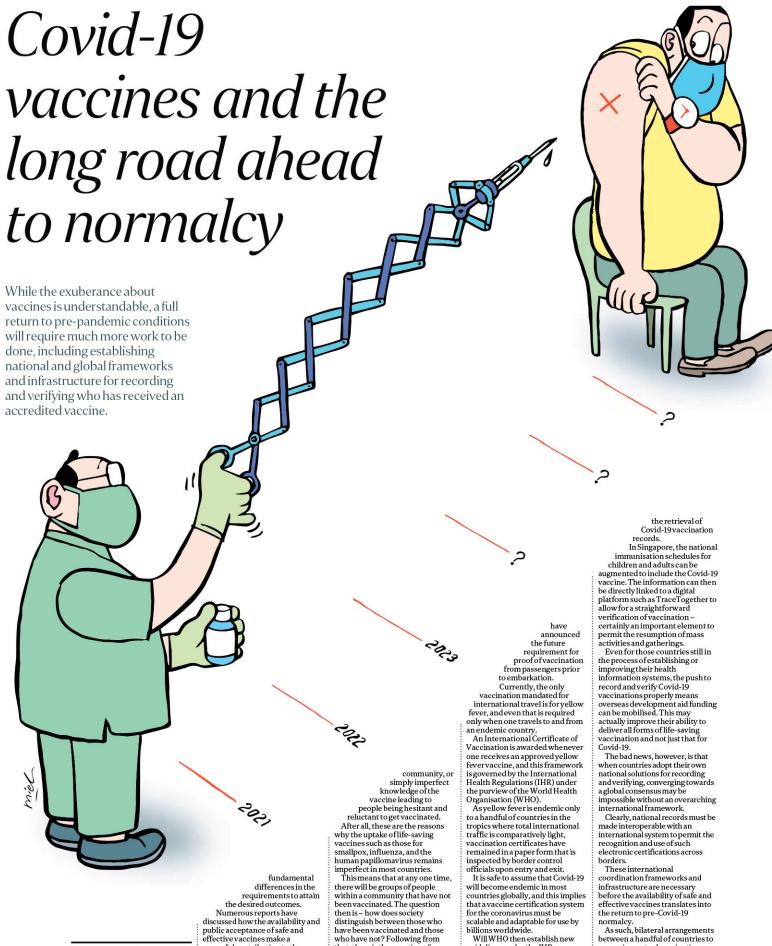


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Teo Yik Ying

For The Straits Times

In the past four weeks, the world greeted the continual positive findings from several late-stage Covid-19 vaccine trials with loud cheers. Global stock markets rallied, and the surge in share prices of aviation and tourism counters revealed the widespread optimism of the world about a return to pre-Covid-19 normalcy.

This enthusiasm is reinforced whenever governments worldwide announce their plans to procure and deliver the vaccines, regardless of the important caveat to prioritise limited vaccine doses for front-line workers and high-risk groups before mass distribution to the rest of the population is possible. What has been overlooked in this vaccine furore, however, is the

distinction between protecting individuals from infection and mortality, and allowing societies and communities to return to pre-Covid-19 normalcy. While the two objectives may appear to be aligned, there are

Numerous reports have discussed how the availability a public acceptance of safe and effective vaccines make a powerful contribution to the existing public health toolkit in the fight against Covid-19 that includes mask wearing and social distancing to protect peo

against infection. However, this narrative tends to focus on how the risk to individuals is lowered and, in return, the healthcare services are protected from being overwhelmed, but it does not actually address how societies can

return to regular activities.

The latter can happen only when appropriate national and international infrastructure is established for recording and verifying who has received an redited vaccine This sounds trivial, but the reality is far from so.

Logistical challenges

Let us start from the fact that, regardless of the supply of vaccines that is available to a country, it will be impossible to expect everyone to be vaccinated. This may be due to the logistical challenges of vaccinating millions of people distributed over a vast geographical expanse, the inability to reach out to everyone in a within a community that have n been vaccinated. The question then is – how does society distinguish between those who have been vaccinated and those who have not? Following from that, there is the question of whether there should be different rules for these two broad categories of people. For instance, should a pub

be empowered to reject patrons who have not been vaccinated? Or a school principal mandated to block unvaccinated students from examples may sound extreme, but already some international airlines

So while there is certainly light at the end of the tunnel, it still remains a very long tunnel ahead. What each of us can do at this point in time is to make an effort to learn about the Covid-19 vaccines before they are ready for distribution. In doing so, we are playing our role as responsible citizens of the world as we start walking towards the light.

the return to pre-Covid-19 normalcy.
As such, bilateral arrangements

between a handful of countries to recognise mutual vaccination strategies will perhaps be necessary in the short term to restart international travel. Otherwise, I am less sanguine about that flight to any overseas holiday destination in the next 12

In the above narrative, we have not even discussed the additional complexities of the vaccination roll-out, not least the fact that in most countries the process is likely to be patchy initially because of limited supplies. There is also the possibility that vaccines may confer only short-term protection. and repeated vaccinations are

and repeated vaccinations are necessary for lifelong defence against Sars-CoV-2.

So while there is certainly light at the end of the tunnel, it still remains a very long tunnel ahead. What each of us can do at this point about the Covid-19 vaccines before they are ready for distribution. In doing so, we are playing our role as responsible citizens of the world as we start walking towards the light.

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specifically to accredit Covid-19 vaccines, and to coordinate the establishment of a global

The accreditation process alone is fraught with massive political hazards, given the lack of transparency over the efficacy and safety of some vaccines that are

already being distributed in some

electronic instead of in paper

Beyond international considerations, proof of vaccination may soon be necessary within a country in order for individuals to move about and interact with others more freely in the community. This requires a national framework to record who has been vaccinated, and that these records be accessible to individuals or

corporations.
The good news is that a national system to record and verify vaccinations already exists in many countries, including Singapore, and this can be modified and adapted to permit