

COVID Safe Pass

POLICY BRIEF AND BACKGROUNDER

Ontario COVID Safe Pass for Safe, Sustainable Reopening

The Board's Role

WHAT PERSPECTIVE DOES THE BOARD OFFER?

Throughout the pandemic, the Toronto Region Board of Trade (the Board) has convened stakeholders and conducted research to understand the impacts of the pandemic on the Region's businesses and workers.

The breadth of the input is relevant, as it captures the inputs from businesses of all sizes, across multiple sectors and industries, government leaders, city builders, building owners, and public health officials, as well as best practices from around the world.

For example:

- In May 2020, the Board activated its Reimagining Recovery Framework of six specialized COVID recovery work tracks; convened 25 stakeholder tables comprised of more than 350 individuals, 300 businesses and all three levels of government; and hosted 29 recovery events attended by over 7,100 virtual participants.
- In October 2020, the Board activated its Financial District Pilot Zone, co-chaired by Mayor John Tory, ULI, Toronto and the Financial District BIA, and convened a working group of over 70 building owners, large employers, transit agencies; mitigation solutions providers and public health experts to research global and local best practices in mitigation to support the reopening of Downtown Toronto as a business district when the time was right.
- In January 2021, the Board activated additional pilot zones in two other business districts, being the Pearson Logistics Zone and Scarborough Town Centre.

- In June 2021, following months of work by our research arm, the Economic Blueprint Institute, we launched a new framework to support recovery planning across the region and Innovation Corridor. It highlighted the uneven economic impact of the pandemic across five distinct business districts and what is required to support business recovery in each district.
- In June 2021, we partnered with the City to launch the free Rapid Testing Kit distribution program for businesses across Toronto.
- In July 2021, we co-launched the We're Ready Toronto Campaign, which is sharing essential information and tools to help businesses get ready to open and get their workers back.

WHAT SUPPORTS THE URGENT NEED FOR VACCINE PASSPORTS?

The catastrophic impact on businesses – especially non-essential and small businesses – in the Toronto Region.

- When the Financial District closed, 550,000 workers left the core, leaving 2,500 small businesses without customers overnight.
- 28 million visitors (annually) to the city stopped coming. Business travel accounts for 60% of the visitor economy, so convention centres, hotels, events spaces, restaurants and AV services were impacted. For meetings and events in Toronto, this meant 463 canceled events and 380,000+ lost attendees. The 2020 impact of the loss of the visitor economy was \$8.35B in economic activity in the city of Toronto alone— almost 50% of this loss was felt by retail, food and beverage and our transportation sectors.
- Small businesses have taken on over \$220,000 in debt.

POLICY BRIEF AND BACKGROUNDER

Ontario is surging ahead in vaccination rates – joining the ranks of the most vaccinated provinces and helping Canada become a global vaccination leader.

- Approx. 80% of adults in Ontario have received 1 dose and 56% of adults are fully vaccinated as of July 15, 2021.

We are losing our ability to be competitive interprovincially and internationally.

- Manitoba and Quebec are moving ahead with plans (BC and the Maritimes experience less immediate pressures).
- The OECD and World Health Organization have launched safe travel and smart vaccine initiatives.
- We are aware of more than 40 different digital health ID or immunization certificates under development.

Our Ask

Our members are asking three questions:

- 1 What is the plan to keep them open in the event of a fourth wave?
- 2 How do they ensure a safe return to work and the office?
- 3 How can we remain competitive?

To give businesses every opportunity to reopen safely, remain open, and avoid a lockdown should cases surge in the Fall as predicted, we recommend implementing a COVID safe pass program.

A COVID safe pass would be provided to those who are fully immunized or who have received a negative COVID test result in the case of those not immunized or choosing not to be immunized.

The choice of vaccination is, and remains, a personal one.

A COVID safe pass would be optional for non-essential businesses and services; however, if cases rise and businesses are on the verge of lock down, the government could make the use of the tool mandatory — similar to the other public health requirements that are put in place and then lifted/revoked.

CALL TO ACTION

Deliver interoperable COVID Safe Pass in Ontario

- **A secure, reliable COVID safe pass system** that enables Ontarians to demonstrate that they have either been vaccinated against COVID-19 or that they have a recent negative test.
- A system that is usable both through **digital technology and in a physical format** for those who do not have access to technology like smart phones.
- The COVID safe pass system must be more **secure and easy to use** than the existing vaccination receipt system, and it must omit unnecessary health information (such as date of birth, health card number, and location and time of vaccination) that is present on the receipt.
- COVID safe pass should be **entirely separate from personal health records**, and exclusively contain information (such as vaccination and/or test status) relevant to pandemic mitigation.
- When used to establish COVID safety, it need only **provide a binary “yes or no,”** without providing information on the source of immunity (such as vaccination or recent negative test), which ensures the confidentiality of personal health information.
- The pass system would use technology such as **QR codes, that can also be used for contact tracing** without the need to provide detailed personal information when visiting a business.
- The system should be **fully implemented when all those who wish to be vaccinated have been able to do so.**
- COVID safe pass, using proven technologies, must be **designed to be interoperable with systems used by other provinces and countries**, both to facilitate Ontarians’ travel and to enable safe reopening of the province’s visitor economy.

ONTARIO COVID SAFE PASS

What are we trying to achieve?



How will the COVID Safe Pass be used?



Proof of vaccination



Proof of negative test



Contact tracing

- ✓ Proof that a person has been vaccinated against COVID-19
- ✓ Proof that a person has received a negative COVID-19 test result
- ✓ Trace and/or alert a person about possible exposure to COVID-19

Key features of the COVID Safe Pass



Digital and paper versions



QR code that shows vaccination or test status



Digital signature for authentication



Privacy and security - protected personal health information



Interoperable with other provinces and countries, and across platforms

CONTEXT

The Need for a COVID Safe Pass

The COVID Safe Pass is currently under consideration or approved at policy tables and in development across various industries. These credentials, a form of digital identity, would allow governments and businesses to verify the COVID status of individuals for the purposes of managing risk in various contexts as determined by public health imperatives. It could help the recovery, including through the facilitation of domestic and international business and leisure travel, return to work, and leisure activities like bars, restaurants, concerts, and sporting events.

Vaccination certification or vaccine passports are not novel concepts. The World Health Organization (WHO) International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP or yellow vaccination card) has been the standard for many years and remains a requirement to enter certain countries today (e.g., yellow fever) and to register for school, including in Ontario. Unfortunately, when it comes to mitigating the risk of a global pandemic, this paper-based certification is neither safe, fit for purpose, nor scalable. Indeed, compared with the alternative of a return to lockdowns, certifications offer a scientific, targeted, and balanced approach to managing the recovery.

Demand has thus increased for a trusted, verifiable, and secure way to digitally share only relevant health data in a quick, convenient, interoperable, and cost-effective manner. This requires an efficient system to authenticate and validate test results, vaccination status, quarantine and contact tracing, to ensure the credentials relate to the individual using them. It could also, if desired, verify recovery status as an additional proof of immunity. **When the system is used to certify COVID safety, it need only provide a binary “yes or no” certification, without even needing to certify that such safety has been established by either vaccination or a recent test.**

The implementation of a COVID Safe Pass system will give businesses an additional tool to ensure that their operations are safe, and to increase the comfort and confidence of their patrons. In fact, many Canadians support the use of safe passes for the resumption of a variety of activities. For instance according to an Ipsos poll:

- 74% approve of the use of such a system for visiting a senior’s home;
- 72% for air travel;
- 67% for attending indoor cultural events;
- 67% for attending post-secondary institutions; and
- 66% for attending outdoor cultural events.¹

It is also an effective approach to ensure safe reopening of the visitor economy. In the event of a major wave of COVID transmission, government may, if desired, impose requirements on the use of the pass in certain situations, potentially as an alternative to the blanket closures that have heretofore been employed.

Rapid vaccination in Canada and many developed countries has encouraged a willingness to open the economy. However, where vaccination rates have not reached the same level, there are concerns around the disparity that requiring vaccinations as a precondition to mobility may engender. There is therefore an urgent need for solutions that would facilitate increased mobility and public confidence through vaccinations, testing, and recovery status. To achieve this, a COVID Safe Pass system interoperable throughout Canada and internationally is required. Globally, governments, private sector, and civil society have introduced their own systems or are coming together to build systems that could be technically feasible, globally interoperable, and ethically sound. Some examples are listed below:

1. Majority of Canadians Support Vaccine Passports for Variety of Indoor and Outdoor Activities

CONTEXT

EU Digital Covid Certificate

- Available and interoperable across all EU countries and internationally
- Certificate contains a QR code (paper and/or digital) that certifies:
 - Vaccine status
 - COVID-19 test results
 - COVID-19 recovery information (date of last positive PCR test)
- Contains a digitally signed signature from issuing bodies protecting certificate from falsification
- Certificate signature verified via EU gateway upon scanning
- For authentication, personal data does not pass through gateway nor does it remain with verifying entity
- Voluntary during testing period, mandatory in some jurisdictions for certain activities (France)
- In some jurisdictions, certificate combined with contact tracing capability via QR scanning or bluetooth technology (France)

New York: Excelsior Pass (IBM)

- Voluntary, verifies and shares vaccination records or recent test results
- Businesses and venues can scan a QR code in the mobile app, on a printout, or in a “digital wallet” to ensure an individual meets any COVID-19 vaccination or testing requirements for entry. Presenting another ID is required to prevent fraud.

Denmark: Coronapas (Bizaghi)

- Uses the NemID (a secure digital ID used for government and other services) to share proof of vaccination or PCR test results or proof of recovery
- Mandatory for access to cultural attractions, sport and fitness, religious activities beyond a certain number of people, personal services (haircuts etc.), indoor dining.

Israel: Greenpass

- Available to those who are vaccinated or have recovered, and permits access to amenities like gyms, restaurants, and venues.

AOKpass (International Chamber of Commerce)

International Air Transport Association’s (IATA) Travel Pass (+21 Airlines)

- Includes registry of health requirements to provide passenger's information on destination entry restrictions
- Includes registry of testing labs in passenger’s location
- Allows labs to securely send test results to or vaccination certificates to passengers
- Allows airlines to provide accurate information to passengers
- Enables passengers to (1) create a ‘digital passport’, (2) verify their test/vaccination meets the regulations & (3) shares test or vaccination certificates with authorities to facilitate travel

Key Elements of Pass Implementations

A review of proposals from governments, regional authorities (European Union), businesses, industry associations, and civil society indicates a growing consensus on the following key elements:²

- Collaboration – public-private partnerships
- Interprovincial, international, and cross-platform interoperability
- Data privacy, security, and ethics
- Equity and inclusivity
- Citizen/Customer first design approach
- Open standards
- Sustainability and Scalability
- Alignment with international standards
- Time limitation

Wide-spread testing, a pillar of success

As of July 15, 2021, 52% of Canadians over age 12 have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, making Canada one of the global leaders.³ At the same time, only 12% of the world's population has been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.⁴ Destination Canada estimates that full global vaccination may not be achieved until 2026.⁵ Therefore, vaccinations should not be seen as a pre-condition for travel or participation in the economy. As global procurement of vaccines improves, wide-spread testing should also be prioritised and ensured across Canada and globally to allow individuals easy access to tests for the purposes of mobility. Initiatives like the Toronto Region Board of Trade's partnership with the City of Toronto to allow small businesses free access to rapid testing kits must be the new norm.⁶ Equity should be a central consideration and costs for testing should be kept at an accessible level. COVID Safe Pass will enable verification of testing so that non-vaccinated people can still participate in society.

The Economic Context

Lockdowns and border closures have restricted the lifeblood of our economy. Non-essential businesses as well as the visitor economy have been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions.

Globally, the travel and tourism industry suffered greatly, shrinking by 49% relative to 2019.⁷ The knock-on effects were immediate and just as deep in Canada as the visitor economy lost USD 112 billion and 373,000 jobs in 2020.⁸ The result in our cities has been severe. The Toronto region's visitor economy lost CAD 14 billion. The consequences for the economy – job and productivity losses, business closures, loss of morale – have been grave and inaction risks long-term recovery.

Pre-pandemic, 27.5 million people visited Toronto per year. In 2018, visitors to the Toronto region spent \$10.6 billion, which in turn supported 3.6% of all regional employment and offset \$830 of tax revenue for every Toronto region household. International visitors are particularly important economically: while they make up only 15% of visitors, they account for 45% of total visitor spending. 398,993 business delegates attended 113 major conferences and events in Toronto in 2018, generating \$858 million in economic impact. Large conferences are generally planned several years in advance, and therefore conference planners place a premium on long-term certainty since a cancelled conference can result in a major financial loss for organizers.

Canadian cities are currently at a competitive disadvantage for consideration by international conference planners as locations for major conferences in the coming years because Canada's pandemic recovery and post-pandemic policy landscape is too uncertain. This will result in a major long-term loss for the Canadian tourism industry and could result in a permanent shift away from Canada in this sector.

While the visitor economy has indeed suffered, small businesses, which employ approximately 64% of the total Canadian labour force, have been hit especially hard by pandemic-related measures. These impacts are anticipated to be ongoing, adding further impetus to measures enabling a safe, sustainable resumption of

2. EU e-Health Network, WTTTC, Ada Lovelace,

3. COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker Canada

4. Our World in Data

5. Travel Forecast June 2021, Destination Canada

6. *Workplace self-screening tests*

7. *Travel & Tourism: Global Economic Impact & Trends 2020*. World Travel & Tourism Council

8. *Travel & Tourism: Canada Economic Impact*, World Travel & Tourism Council

economic activity. According to a Statistics Canada survey, over one quarter of small businesses anticipate a decrease in sales over the next three months.⁹ This delayed recovery is exacerbated by uncertainty about policies that will be in place to guarantee safety of people.

Trends point to a protracted recovery for the travel and tourism sector which will have significant secondary effects on the economy. Destination Canada forecasts a return to 2019 revenue levels by 2025 if travel conditions hold, and beyond 2026 if they deteriorate.¹⁰

Finally, a persistent worry within the scientific community is whether global herd immunity will be achievable due to the circulation of variants and global vaccine hesitancy rates.^{11,12} Therefore, it is increasingly evident that a strong interim solution that allows safe, sustainable reopening of the economy is indispensable. It will be the difference between a deterioration or improvement of the public health and economic crisis. Put simply, we must learn to live with the virus in the short-term and build a toolset to improve our resiliency to future shocks and pandemics in the long-term.

Delivering a Pass System

To date, Quebec has announced a digital health pass and Manitoba have been providing a proof of vaccination in paper form. This leaves a significant majority of Canadians without options for COVID certification. Canada's federal and provincial leaders should align incentives across government by convening stakeholders from relevant ministries including but not limited to health, tourism, public safety, transportation, and environment and define roles and responsibilities to ensure coordinated approach towards the development and deployment of COVID Safe Pass. Governments should engage tech, business, and civil society sectors to acquire data and input on challenges and opportunities for the safe, sustainable reopening of the economy.

The Ontario government can collaborate with governmental and other partners to develop an interprovincially,

internationally, and cross-platform interoperable gateway that would allow the verification of various jurisdictions' COVID certifications following other successful approaches such as the EU's Green Pass. This would include defining the minimum data sets required, developing a system for unique identifiers for proof of certificate, and a trust framework¹³ to provide basis for establishing the authenticity, integrity, and validity of any certificate.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been severe it has also spurred innovation in the private sector to tackle difficult questions such as safe, sustainable, economic reopening. Many solutions to achieve this exist and following the principle of public-private partnerships, governments should engage businesses where appropriate to achieve this.

Digital health passes will need to be mutually recognizable. This requires policy questions that may be used to validate such certificates to be addressed. To ensure uptake of COVID Safe Pass, federal and provincial leaders should:

- Agree that vaccination alone will not be a pre-condition for mobility and participation in the economy.¹⁴
- Agree to a general data privacy and security standard for digital pass standards—the most important of which should be to keep an individual's data¹⁵ on the pass system and not store it.
- Set validity standards on key areas necessary for the functioning of the COVID safe certificates such as:
 - Identifying acceptable tests and testing procedures.
 - Identifying which vaccines are approved for each jurisdiction.
 - Setting standards for recovery certification.
 - Agreeing on a period of validity for vaccines, recovery, and test results.
- Certify domestic testing and vaccination facilities (clinics, hospitals, testing, and vaccine centres, etc.) providing unique digital signature keys for certificate disbursement via printed or digital QR Code.

9. Impact of COVID-19 on small businesses in Canada, second quarter of 2021, Statistics Canada, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00022-eng.htm>

10. *Travel Forecast June 2021*, Destination Canada

11. Aschwanden, Christie. *Five Reasons Why COVID Herd Immunity Is Probably Impossible*. Nature News, Nature Publishing Group, 18 Mar. 2021.

12. Cookson, Clive. *Vaccines versus Variants: Will the World Ever Reach Herd Immunity?*. Financial Times, 23 May 2021.

13. A trust framework defines the rules, policies, protocols, formats, and standards needed

to ensure that Covid-19 health certificates are issued in such a way that their authenticity and integrity can be verified and trusted.

14. For instance, some individuals may not be able to get a vaccine due to health reasons or lack of availability. Therefore, in keeping with the principle of inclusivity, and protecting the human rights of everyone, vaccines should not be a pre-requisite for travel or participation in the economy where an individual can provide a negative test or a recovery certificate.

15. Name, date of birth, issue date, relevant information about vaccine/test/recovery and a unique identifier.

CONCLUSION

To overcome the health and economic crisis, we must learn to live with the virus. COVID Safe Pass is an essential tool to protect significant gains made in curbing the transmission of the virus and helping to overcome the health emergency and economic downturn. Reliable certification of vaccination and/or testing status offers a safe, sustainable way to re-open and manage the health risks associated with COVID. Governments should act to ensure that businesses and residents have as much certainty as possible regarding the resumption of the activities essential to the lifeblood of our civic and economic life.