

Science News

from research organizations

Immunity passports to vaccination certificates for COVID-19: Equitable and legal challenges

Date: May 5, 2020

Source: Georgetown University Medical Center

Summary: As governments explore the possibility of issuing so-called 'immunity passports,' such action poses significant practical, equitable, and legal issues. In contrast, if and when a vaccine is developed, vaccination certificates will likely play an important role in ending the pandemic and protecting global health.

Share:     

FULL STORY

As governments from countries including the U.S., Germany, Italy and the U.K., explore the possibility of issuing so-called "immunity passports," a leading global health and legal scholar warns that such action poses significant practical, equitable, and legal issues. In contrast, if and when a vaccine is developed, vaccination certificates will likely play an important role in ending the pandemic and protecting global health.

Writing in *The Lancet*, Alexandra L. Phelan, SJD, LL.M., LL.B., an assistant professor at Georgetown University Medical Center and a faculty member of its Center for Global Health Science and Security, writes that immunity passports "create an artificial restriction on who can and cannot participate in social and economic activities," warning that this creates "a perverse incentive for individuals to seek out infection."

"Immunity passports would be ripe for both corruption and implicit bias" and would "exacerbate the harm inflicted by COVID-19 on already vulnerable populations," Phelan argues. And she adds that the people "most incentivised to seek out infection might also be those unable or understandably hesitant to seek medical care due to cost and discriminatory access."

Immunity passports would also face legal challenges, argues Phelan, who is also an adjunct professor at Georgetown Law and a member of its O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law. While the International Health Regulations prohibit health measures that are discriminatory and impede international travel, at present, she explains, countries may not have laws to expressly address discrimination experienced by those without "immunoprivilege."

"Immunity passports would risk enshrining such discrimination in law and undermine the right to health of individuals and the population through the perverse incentives they create," she writes.

In contrast, if and when a vaccine is developed, "vaccination certificates" may be an important tool to incentivize vaccination, evidence protection, and resume international trade and travel. Unlike immunity passports, vaccination certificates are expressly permissible under the International Health Regulations, which govern when countries can use them. Phelan sets out the legal steps required to be able to use vaccination certificates in the COVID-19 response.

"Until a COVID-19 vaccine is available, and accessible, which is not guaranteed, the way out of this crisis will be built on established public health practices of testing, contact tracing, quarantine of contacts, and isolation of cases," Phelan concludes. "The success of these practices is largely dependent on public trust, solidarity and addressing -- not entrenching -- the inequities and injustices that contributed to this outbreak becoming a pandemic."

Story Source:

Materials provided by **Georgetown University Medical Center**. *Note: Content may be edited for style and length.*

Journal Reference:

1. Alexandra L Phelan. **COVID-19 immunity passports and vaccination certificates: scientific, equitable, and legal challenges**. *The Lancet*, 2020; DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31034-5

Cite This Page:

MLA	APA	Chicago
-----	-----	---------

Georgetown University Medical Center. "Immunity passports to vaccination certificates for COVID-19: Equitable and legal challenges." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 5 May 2020.
<www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/05/200505093118.htm>.

RELATED STORIES

Public Health Leadership Paramount to Emerging Coronavirus Pandemic

Mar. 19, 2020 — In the 1960s, public health officials led the US and worldwide efforts that resulted in smallpox becoming the first human disease ever eradicated from the face of the earth. Researchers say ... **read more »**

Annual Influenza Vaccination Does Not Prevent Natural Immunity

Nov. 13, 2017 — Earlier studies have suggested that having repeated annual influenza vaccination can prevent natural immunity to the virus, and potentially increase the susceptibility to influenza illness in the ... **read more »**

Funding a Set of Essential Medicines for Low And Middle-Income Countries

Nov. 8, 2016 — As the world moves toward universal health coverage, the question arises: How can governments ensure equitable access to essential medicines in low- and middle-income countries? A section of The ... **read more »**

Comprehensive Global Prevention Can End HIV/AIDS Pandemic, Experts Say

July 21, 2015 — Although much progress has been made in combating the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, to halt new infections and end the pandemic, a combination of non-vaccine and vaccine prevention modalities will be ...

[read more »](#)

FROM AROUND THE WEB

Below are relevant articles that may interest you. ScienceDaily shares links with scholarly publications in the TrendMD network and earns revenue from third-party advertisers, where indicated.

[FDA to Harmonize COVID-19 Data with New Terminology Codes](#)

Madeleine Johnson, [GenomeWeb](#), 2020

[Coronavirus in the Crescent City](#)

Ciara Curtin, [GenomeWeb](#), 2020

[SARS-CoV-2 Experience Will Help Agency Strike Right Balance With LDTs, FDA Says](#)

Kelsy Ketchum, [360Dx](#), 2020

[Thermo Fisher Scientific Details Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Business](#)

Julia Karow, [GenomeWeb](#), 2020

[Swab from the Couch](#)

Ciara Curtin, [GenomeWeb](#), 2020

[GeneFirst, Rapid Diagnostics Validating Coronavirus Assay for Point-of-Care Platform](#)

Tony Fong, [GenomeWeb](#), 2020

[Dutch Firm Molecular Biology Systems Validating Rapid Thermal Cycler for COVID-19 Testing](#)

Madeleine Johnson, [GenomeWeb](#), 2020

[Using focused ethnography to understand brokering practices among international students](#)

Lee et al., [Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration](#), 2017

Powered by **TREND MD**



Free Subscriptions

Get the latest science news with ScienceDaily's free email newsletters, updated daily and weekly. Or view hourly updated newsfeeds in your RSS reader:

 [Email Newsletters](#)

 [RSS Feeds](#)

Follow Us

Keep up to date with the latest news from ScienceDaily via social networks:

 Facebook

 Twitter

 LinkedIn

Have Feedback?

Tell us what you think of ScienceDaily -- we welcome both positive and negative comments. Have any problems using the site? Questions?

 Leave Feedback

 Contact Us

[About This Site](#) | [Staff](#) | [Reviews](#) | [Contribute](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Editorial Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#)

Copyright 2020 ScienceDaily or by other parties, where indicated. All rights controlled by their respective owners.

Content on this website is for information only. It is not intended to provide medical or other professional advice.

Views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of ScienceDaily, its staff, its contributors, or its partners.

Financial support for ScienceDaily comes from advertisements and referral programs, where indicated.

[Do Not Sell My Personal Information](#)