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Covid-19: Vaccine passports approved in Scotland despite criticism

Bryan Christie

Vaccine passports will be required for entry to nightclubs and other “high risk” venues in Scotland despite complaints there is no evidence the measure will reduce transmission of covid-19.

The Scottish parliament voted to introduce the scheme from 1 October when entry to such venues will be restricted to people who can prove they have been fully vaccinated. It comes as infection rates have soared in recent weeks in Scotland with the World Health Organization finding the country has some of the highest rates in Europe.¹

The Scottish health secretary Humza Yousaf said, “We must do all we can to stem the rise in cases and vaccine certification will form part of a range of measures which can help us to do this.”

The passports will be required for entry to nightclubs, unseated indoor venues with more than 500 people, unseated outdoor venues with more than 4000 people, and all events with more than 10,000 people. It is also hoped that they will encourage younger people to get vaccinated to continue to attend such events.

The three main opposition parties at Holyrood all spoke out against the plan. Alex Cole-Hamilton, leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, said, “You should never have to provide any aspect of your medical history to a bouncer to get into a nightclub.” He said there is no clear evidence that vaccine passports will reduce transmission and said resources should be concentrated on establishing an effective contact tracing system.

In a paper outlining how the scheme will work, the Scottish government said it would continue to gather evidence from around the world on certification schemes to inform its approach in Scotland.²

Hospitality businesses complained of additional burdens in implementing the scheme, a lack of time to prepare, and a lack of consultation over what it entails. A football fans’ group, Supporters Direct Scotland, said the scheme will exclude some fans from games.

In Spain, courts have been asked to rule between the competing interests of individual liberty and infection control and have blocked the Andalusian government’s attempt to introduce vaccine passports for entry to nightlife venues. The High Court decided there was not enough proof that cases of infection originated in such venues.³

Despite the criticism of vaccine passports, their use is expected to be extended to England by next month. The vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi has said they will be introduced for large venues to avoid a spike in covid infections and prevent another lockdown being necessary.

1 WHO European region covid-19 subnational explorer. <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/3a056fc8839d47969ef59949e9984a71>

2 Coronavirus: mandatory vaccine certification. September 2021. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-mandatory-vaccine-certification/>

3 Court rules against Andalusia’s Covid pass for nightlife venues. El Pais. August 2021. <https://english.elpais.com/society/2021-08-09/court-rules-against-andalusias-covid-pass-for-nightlife-venues.html>

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