Coronavirus: Commission proposes to strengthen coordination of safe travel in the EU

Brussels, 25 November 2021

Today, the European Commission has proposed to update the rules on coordination of safe and free movement in the EU, which were put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the summer, vaccine uptake has increased significantly and the EU Digital COVID Certificate has been rolled out successfully, with more than 650 million certificates issued to date. At the same time, the epidemiological situation in the EU continues to develop with some Member States taking additional public health measures, including administering booster vaccines. Taking into account all those factors, the Commission is proposing a stronger focus on a 'person-based' approach to travel measures and a standard acceptance period for vaccination certificates of 9 months since the primary vaccination series. The 9 month period takes into account the guidance of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on the administration of booster doses as of 6 months, and provides for an additional period of 3 months to ensure that national vaccination campaigns can adjust and citizens can have access to boosters.

The Commission is also proposing updates to the EU traffic light map; as well as a simplified 'emergency brake' procedure.

The Commission is also proposing today to update the rules on external travel to the EU [press release available as of 14:15].

Didier **Reynders**, Commissioner for Justice, said: *"Since the start of the pandemic, the Commission has been fully active in finding solutions to guarantee the safe free movement of people in a coordinated manner. In light of the latest developments and scientific evidence, we are proposing a new recommendation to be adopted by the Council. Based on our common tool, the EU Digital COVID Certificate, which has become a real standard, we are moving to a 'person-based' approach. Our main objective is avoid diverging measures throughout the EU. This also applies to the question of boosters, which will be essential to fight the virus. Among other measures, we propose today that the Council agrees on a standard validity period for vaccination certificates issued following the primary series. Agreeing on this proposal will be crucial for the months ahead and the protection of the safe free movement for citizens."*

Stella **Kyriakides**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety added: *"The EU Digital COVID Certificate and our coordinated approach to travel measures have greatly contributed to safe free movement, with the protection of public health as our priority. We have vaccinated over 65% of the total EU population, but this is not enough. There are still too many people who are not protected. For everyone to travel and live as safely as possible, we need to reach significantly higher vaccination rates – urgently. We also need to reinforce our immunity with booster vaccines. Taking into account the guidance from ECDC, and to allow Member States to adjust their vaccination campaigns and for citizens to have access to boosters, we propose a standard acceptance period for vaccination certificates. At the same time, we have to continue to strongly encouraging everyone to continue to respect public health measures. Our masks need to stay on."*

Key updates to the common approach to travel measures within the EU proposed by the Commission are:

- **Focus on a 'person-based approach'**: a person who has a valid EU Digital COVID Certificate should in principle not be subject to additional restrictions, such as tests or quarantine, regardless of their place of departure in the EU. Persons without an EU Digital COVID Certificate could be required to undergo a test carried out prior to or after arrival.

- **Standard validity of vaccination certificates:** To avoid diverging and disruptive approaches, the Commission proposes a standard acceptance period of 9-month for vaccination certificates issued following the completion of the primary vaccination series. The 9 month period takes into account the guidance of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on the administration of booster doses as of 6 months, and provides for an additional period of

3 months to ensure that national vaccination campaigns can adjust and citizens can have access to boosters. This means that, in the context of travel, Member States should not refuse a vaccination certificate that has been issued less than 9 months since the administration of the last dose of the primary vaccination. Member States should immediately take all necessary steps to ensure access to vaccination for those population groups whose previously issued vaccination certificates approach the 9-month limit.

- **Booster shots:** As of yet, there are no studies expressly addressing the effectiveness of boosters on transmission of COVID-19 and therefore it is not possible to determine an acceptance period for boosters. However, given the emerging data it can be expected that protection from booster vaccinations may last longer than that resulting from the primary vaccination series. The Commission will closely monitor newly emerging scientific evidence on this issue. On the basis of such evidence, the Commission may, if needed, propose an appropriate acceptance period also for vaccination certificates issued following a booster.

- **The EU traffic light map is adapted:** combining new cases with a region's vaccine uptake. The map would be mainly for information purposes, but would also serve to coordinate measures for areas with particularly low ('green') or particularly high level ('dark red') of circulation of the virus. For these areas, specific rules would apply by derogation from the 'persons-based approach'. For travellers from 'green' areas, no restrictions should be applied. Travel to and from 'dark red' areas should be discouraged, given the high number of new infections there, and persons who are neither vaccinated nor have recovered from the virus should be required to undergo a pre-departure test and quarantine after arrival (with special rules for essential travelers and children under 12 years old).

- **Exemptions from certain travel measures:** should apply for cross-border commuters, children under 12 and essential travellers. The list of essential travellers should be reduced as many travellers included in the current list have had the opportunity to be vaccinated in the meantime.

- **Simplified 'emergency brake' procedure:** the emergency procedure intended to delay the spread of possible new COVID-19 variants or address particularly serious situations should be simplified and more operational. It would include a Member State notification to the Commission and the Council and a roundtable at the Council's Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR).

To allow for sufficient time for the coordinated approach to be implemented, the Commission proposes that these updates apply as of 10 January 2022.

Background

On 3 September 2020, the Commission made a proposal for a Council Recommendation to ensure that any measures taken by Member States that restrict free movement due to the coronavirus pandemic are coordinated and clearly communicated at EU level.

On 13 October 2020, EU Member States committed to ensuring more coordination and better information sharing by adopting the Council Recommendation.

On 1 February 2021, the Council adopted a first update to the Council Recommendation, which introduced a new colour, 'dark red', for the mapping of risk areas and set out stricter measures applied to travellers from high-risk areas.

On 20 May 2021, the Council amended the Council Recommendation to allow non-essential travel for fully vaccinated people, as well as to strengthen the measures to contain the spread of variants of concern.

On 14 June 2021, the Parliament and the Council adopted the Regulation establishing the EU Digital COVID Certificate framework. To make best use of the EU Digital COVID Certificate, the Council adopted, on the same day, a second update to the Council Recommendation, providing for exemptions from travel restrictions for fully vaccinated and recovered persons.

Since June 2021, the rollout of the EU Digital COVID Certificate has progressed at rapid pace. On 18 October 2021, the Commission issued the first report on the EU Digital COVID Certificate system, a widely available and reliably accepted tool to facilitate free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In view of these developments, the common approach set out in Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 should be adapted further, which was also a request made by the European Council in its conclusions of 22 October 2021.

In parallel, as done for the EU DCC Regulation, the Commission adopted today a proposal to cover

also third country nationals lawfully residing in the EU and third country nationals who have legally entered the territory of a Member State, who may move freely within the territories of all other Member States during no more than 90 days in any 180-day period. The latest information on travel rules as communicated by Member States are available on the Re-open EU website.

More information

Questions & Answers on the new Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation to facilitate safe free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic

Factsheet on the new Commission proposal to ensure coordination on safe travel in the EU

Factsheet COVID-19: Travel and health measures in the EU

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach to facilitate safe free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic and replacing Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475

The EU Digital COVID Certificate: a global standard with more than 591 million certificates

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