Considerations on health verification tools to support air travel

Summary

- Governments and airlines share the same goal - to restart international travel while protecting public health.

- Working together to develop national roadmaps that set out a phased removal of restrictions as the public health situation are critical to achieving a safe and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

- COVID-19 testing and vaccination as well as effective in-country contact tracing will continue to key elements in government risk mitigation strategy.

- IATA urges governments that are designing solutions for test and vaccine credential verification to consider both the logistical constraints and the international nature of air travel; and consult with the industry in the earliest stages of the technical design.

- This will ensure that any solutions can be operationalized, automated and ultimately avoid causing congestion of passengers at airports. This will deliver maximum benefit for travellers, as well as supporting governments with the recovery of international connectivity and protection of public health.

Use of government web portals to verify test and vaccine certificates

Some governments are collecting health information on travellers to facilitate contact tracing to enable the containment of COVID-19 outbreaks in the immediate post-travel period. Several states have set up dedicated web portals where travellers can upload the required information (e.g.: recent travel history, additional contact information, possible contacts with infected individuals, etc.) and receive an "ok to travel" authorization.

In addition, governments are increasingly wanting to determine COVID-19 status of passengers prior to departure. Some states such as the UK and Spain intend to expand the use of existing web portals to allow travellers to upload test and vaccination certificates in addition to other health information needed for contact tracing.   The verification of these certificates via such web portals must be undertaken by governments and result in the same authorization confirming that the passenger meets the government requirements including health requirements and is "ok to travel".   Passenger data privacy must be protected.

Confirmation of the "ok to travel" must be provided in such a way that airlines, responsible for validating that the passenger possesses the authorization, can automate the validation process and allow the passenger to demonstrate they possess the authorization before arriving to the airport or, where needed, through self-service options at airports. Manual verification of documentation cannot be part of this solution as it will cause congestion at airport check-in and border points which is contrary to the contactless travel experience recommended by ICAO.

Alternative solutions to verification of test and vaccine certificates

IATA recognises that not every government will put in place solutions for direct passenger to government transmission of documentation required to travel and that governments may delegate to airlines the responsibility to verify the health status of inbound travellers and to collect additional required information such as travel history.

The industry has developed solutions (such as IATA Travel Pass) that can perform the verification of required documents held by the passenger and generate "ok to travel" authorization; allowing for automation while avoiding the need for airlines to collect or store health of travel history information.

Solutions that follow key principles (shown below) can give governments the confidence that they are mitigating the risks of COVID-19.

Principles for a global approach

- A solution to declaring passenger health data needs to be interoperable, consistent, scalable, affordable and simple to implement.
- Airlines should not be involved in the collection of data but to ease automation, passenger experience and airlines' operation; such data elements should be harmonized, and the collection process be standardised.
- Solutions must not rely on airlines collecting or storing health or travel history information.
- Any declaration must be done in advance of travel to avoid burdensome processes at airports

Conclusions

- IATA urges governments to consult with the industry at the earliest stages of proposed development or enhancements of web portal and other solutions for verification of test and vaccine certificates.
- As well as providing inputs on operationalizing the solutions, IATA can propose solutions such as IATA Travel Pass and Timatic.
- This will ensure the solutions developed deliver a smooth passenger experience at airports by avoiding bottlenecks while protecting public health.