

Can I travel without getting a vaccine?

By **Christopher Elliott**

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I'm probably one of the last people who will get one of the coronavirus vaccines. I'm healthy and a little too young to be considered at risk.

But I want to travel soon. So, like a lot of other unvaccinated people with wanderlust, I've been wondering: Can I travel without being vaccinated?

Answer: It depends on where I want to go.

Most airlines currently allow passengers to fly unvaccinated. But some require a negative coronavirus test. Qantas, the Australian carrier, has announced that it will begin mandating proof of vaccination for international flights.

Hotels generally do not require a negative coronavirus test or a vaccination. The same goes for car rental companies and vacation rentals.

Most cruise lines are not operating. When they resume, at least one of them, U.K.-based Saga Cruises, will require passengers to have been vaccinated at least 14 days before sailing. Others are expected to follow suit.

Your vaccination status could also affect access at your next destination. Restaurants, concert venues and other attractions might require a negative test result or proof of vaccination. No one knows what will happen yet.

"I believe that once the vaccine is offered to the general public, proof of vaccination will be the golden ticket to travel," says Sylvia Lebovitch, a lead travel adviser with Ovation Travel Group, "especially internationally."

So who will need to be vaccinated? Which countries might require the shots? What kind of documentation will you have to show, and is there any way around that? While it may be too early to answer those questions with any certainty, that hasn't stopped the experts from trying.

The most obvious barrier could be at the border.

"Some countries may start requiring vaccines for entry or visa requirements," says Ben Carothers, a flight coordinator for Global Air Ambulance.

No country has announced a vaccine requirement yet. But Carothers says that based on previous outbreaks, it probably isn't a question of if, but when countries will impose such rules.

"We're already seeing so many travel shutdowns that a vaccine might be the only way to ensure travel internationally," he says.

That could put some travelers in a difficult spot, experts say.

“No one can be forced to take a vaccine,” says Len Horovitz, a physician and pulmonary specialist at [Lenox Hill Hospital](#) in New York. “But not being vaccinated may shut some people out of options where a vaccination is required.”

Horovitz says travel without a vaccination or antibodies from a previous infection may raise the risk of contracting covid-19. And while masks offer some protection against infection, they don’t eliminate the threat.

“Most patients are becoming less hesitant to travel as they see people vaccinated without any appreciable side effects,” he says.

It’s difficult to predict which countries will require vaccination. “I would think it would be areas that have less access to medical vaccinations,” says Angie Licea, a division president at [Internova Travel Group](#), a travel network. “Areas that might be more susceptible to individuals contracting the virus or spreading the virus, if not vaccinated.”

If you think requiring vaccination seems too intrusive, travel experts say you may need to think again.

“We have to remember that while this all seems new to us now, the reality is that travelers have been showing proof of vaccination or receiving travel vaccinations to enter certain destinations for decades — completely without concern,” says Ragan Stone, a travel adviser and owner of [Ragan Stone Travel](#) in Birmingham, Ala.

Will you need more than just a vaccine record? Yes, says Mariea Snell, assistant director of [doctor of nursing practice programs at Maryville University in Missouri](#). The technology for tracking your vaccines, still under development, will need to do more than confirm your vaccinations.

“With the variations in efficacy between vaccines, it will be important to show what vaccine you received,” she says.

For now, a negative coronavirus test will probably be enough to get you on a plane or across a border. “But once the vaccination is widely available, if you want to travel internationally, there is a very high chance that you will be required to be vaccinated first,” says Narendra Khatri, CEO of [Insubuy](#), a travel insurance company.

How soon that happens is anyone’s guess.

For travelers like me, it’s not a question of whether they can travel without vaccination, but how soon they can get the shots. I’m still waiting for my turn, but Steve Schumann just received his first shot and is already looking forward to traveling again. In 2019, he and his wife made three international trips, but they stayed home last year because of the pandemic.

“We would never think of traveling without the coronavirus vaccine,” says Schumann, a retired security manager from Hayward, Calif. He expects that by June most airlines will require passengers to have proof of vaccination before they can fly.

If that happens, it could throw our summer travel plans into chaos yet again and force many travelers to decide among Pfizer, Moderna — or a staycation.

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