

15 April 2021

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

cc Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall
Associate Minister of Health

TRAVEL HEALTH PASS WORK PROGRAMME

Purpose

A meeting of the COVID-19 Ministerial Group is being convened in the coming weeks. We understand that the meeting will focus on the long-term strategic border re-opening framework. This briefing provides you with an overview of the Travel Health Pass work programme (the Programme), a subset of work within the framework.

Key points

- The implementation of a vaccination certificate for travellers that meet rigorous health criteria, are critical to support the easing of border restrictions without compromising public health.
- We are likely to see countries and the travel industry require with greater frequency verifiable proof of a traveller's COVID-19 health status (e.g. vaccination and/or COVID-19 test results). And the New Zealand government will need to provide people with a way of showing this digitally.
- Conversely, we will also need access to the vaccination status of travellers intending to come to New Zealand. We acknowledge there is ongoing uncertainty about how the COVID-19 risk profile will evolve over 2021. However, preparatory work is necessary to ensure we are well positioned to support travellers coming to New Zealand, when we start to relax our border restrictions in the future.
- Designing an end-to-end process is critical for government agencies, airlines, airports and travellers. Importantly traveller's health credentials must be merged with and form part of the overall set of information that government requires in order to ensure a traveller meets all requirements before being permitted to enter the country. The key features of the work are shown visually in Annex 1.
- There is significant work underway internationally on vaccine certificates and travel health passes, but no international standards as yet. New Zealand is engaged in a number of different fora, and our approach to date has been to maintain wide visibility of developments.
- However, it is fair to say the travel health pass space is 'crowded' and we need to prioritise our engagements to maximise the influence New Zealand can have, and value we gain. Therefore we will continue to focus our forward engagements with:

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- the two critical international standard setting bodies:
 - the World Health Organization; and
 - the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

- [REDACTED]

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- the International Air Transport Association, representing 260 international airlines, who is currently developing and trialling with a number of airlines (including Air New Zealand), a travel pass app insofar as it can be made available to airlines at pre-boarding.

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- In the interim, we recognise there is growing public interest in this area, and we recommend Ministers use the key messages attached at Annex 2 which summarises the focus and staging of the work. We will continue to update these messages as the work progresses.

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Recommendations

We recommend you:

- 1 refer this briefing to other members of the COVID-19 Ministerial Group Yes No
- 2 [REDACTED]
- 3 Invite the COVID-19 Ministerial Group to note the Travel Health Pass work programme and the strategic focus for our international engagements Yes No

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Kirstie Hewlett
Deputy Chief Executive, System and
Regulatory Design

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

15 / 04 / 2021

24 / 4 / 2021

Minister's office to complete:

Approved

Declined

Seen by Minister

Not seen by Minister

Overtaken by events

Comments

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TRAVEL HEALTH PASS WORK PROGRAMME

Programme context

1. Ongoing COVID-19 vaccination across the globe offers the best chance of border re-openings world wide. The effective operation of a vaccination certificate for travellers that meet rigorous health criteria, are critical to support the easing of border restrictions without compromising public health. A vaccination certificate is a medical certificate, either digital or a smart paper solution that enables the holder to show proof of vaccination.
2. While we acknowledge that there is significant uncertainty as to how the global COVID-19 risk profile is likely to evolve over 2021, we are increasingly likely to see countries and the travel industry require verifiable proof of a traveller's COVID-19 health status (e.g. vaccination and/or COVID-19 test results). The New Zealand government will need to provide people who receive COVID-19 vaccination (and/or COVID-19 tests results in New Zealand) with a way of showing this digitally.
3. Conversely, we will also need access to the vaccination status of travellers intending to come to New Zealand. As the roll-out of vaccines progresses, vaccination status could, where appropriate, be added as an additional layer of verification to support either reduced quarantine or quarantine free travel to New Zealand.

Governance, scope and coordination

4. The Programme sits within the 'Keep It Out' and 'Prepare for It' pillars of the Elimination Strategy and within a wider strategic programme led by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) around future border settings.¹
5. The travel health pass work programme is not making decisions around border reopening; rather it will ensure that New Zealanders are able to travel internationally, and that we preserve policy options for the use of travel passes as part of the passenger risk assessment for entry into New Zealand. While we are not there yet, we need to be ready to support the resumption of travel, when it is safe to do so, given the fundamental contribution international connectivity provides to the economic and social wellbeing of New Zealand.
6. The Border Executive Board (BEB)² provides strategic oversight of the Programme. And the Programme itself is being coordinated by the Ministry of Transport (the Ministry) and Ministry of Health (MoH), with inputs/contribution from the following agencies: the DPMC, the New Zealand Customs Service (Customs), the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) including Immigration New Zealand (INZ), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) and other agencies with specific interests.

¹ See Annex 3 for further information.

² The BEB is an interdepartmental executive board serviced by the New Zealand Customs Service. It has been established as part of New Zealand's defence against COVID-19. It is intended to help co-ordinate the management of New Zealand's borders, for example by assisting the relevant departments to make strategic improvements to border systems.

Key features of the Programme / choices Ministers will need to make

Health component

Current situation/key observations

7. COVID-19 vaccinations are being rolled out domestically and internationally. There is considerable variation in the pace and distribution of vaccines and a variety of vaccinations are being deployed internationally.
8. In New Zealand approximately 135,000 vaccines have already been given, and confidence is building about the safety and efficacy of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine that we are using. People vaccinated in New Zealand currently receive a paper-based vaccination certificate that sets out basic information relating to the vaccination and their name, date of birth and National Health Index number. At a national level their vaccination is recorded in the COVID Immunisation Register.
9. Paper certificates, however, are more open to forgery, particularly where they are seen as a means to access certain restricted opportunities. A digital certificate that provides validated credentials about a person's vaccination status will be an important solution to this problem. A visible digital seal applied to vaccination certificates can also serve to validate the authenticity of paper documents and their information.
10. It is important that there is an agreed set of standards for such certificates so that these certificates can be recognised overseas. We are closely engaged with the World Health Organization (WHO), which is developing guidance and technical specifications for member states in adopting interoperable standards for a "Smart Vaccination Certificate". This is likely to provide the best opportunity for internationally agreed standards. Further information on the WHO initiative are summarised further on in this briefing.
11. We recognise the science around vaccine efficacy has and will continue to change. This will influence broader decisions around when and how we might relax border restrictions, but it does not need to influence or delay when we confirm minimum certification or information requirements. It is critical however that any system developed by New Zealand, whether independently or as part of internationally recognised standards, is designed in accordance with this country's public health requirements and information privacy principles.

Border component

Current situation/key observations

12. Work is underway domestically and internationally regarding the need for, the design of and the process associated with health credentials (i.e. proof of vaccination and COVID-19 test results) at the border including how they can be integrated with all of the other information a traveller must provide so that governments can assess risk at, or if possible before, the border. This work explores the integration of all of that data (including health

credentials) using existing Government systems such as the platform on which the New Zealand Electronic Travel Authority (NZeTA) operates.³

13. This sits alongside work already underway between MoH and INZ that will provide a declaration that will allow inbound travellers to provide contact tracing information and answer health questions using an app. It leverages the cloud-based platform on which the NZeTA sits. The app will be launched in April 2021 and may be subsequently iterated, including expanding the notion of an app for travellers to declare the range of information they are required to provide to border agencies

14. The key focus of the border work includes:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

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The Programme is informed by, and contributing to, international thinking

International standard setting bodies

15. The WHO, as noted earlier, has a programme of work on vaccine accreditation. The two deliverables for this work are a specification document for a Smart Vaccination Certificate and the development of an international trusted framework that addresses global interoperability. This initiative is likely to provide the best opportunity for internationally agreed standards. It is expected that final standards and guidance will be issued in June 2021 this year.

³ The NZeTA is an electronic visa waiver, introduced in July 2019. It allows eligible citizens to travel to New Zealand for tourism, business, or transit purposes. Eligible citizens can apply through the NZeTA application online.

16. International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) sets international Standards and Recommendations Practices (SARPs) for civil aviation within the United Nation system. This includes landside formalities associated with the clearance of aircraft, passengers, goods and mail, with respect to the requirements of customs, immigration, public health and agricultural products.⁴ ICAO continues to iterate guidance to States on settings across all facets of civil aviation in response to COVID-19; developed in collaboration with the WHO and industry bodies.

17. As part of our involvement in the ICAO Traveller Identification Programme and its New Technologies Working Group, we are investigating the use of Visible Digital Seals (VDS) that can be used to link COVID-19 vaccinations to passports, and validate the authenticity of the information through the same encryption mechanisms used in ePassports. These specifications have already been developed by ICAO and its working groups. Reporting through the MFAT advises that applying increased security and encryption to immunisation records has already presented some challenges because countries like Canada and the United States, that have sub-national health authorities that undertake the vaccinations and other jurisdictions are not keeping any records of vaccinations.

Partnering with other key countries

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19. [REDACTED]

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20. [REDACTED]

Technology developments are extensive

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21. The travel health pass space is very crowded with lots of different players around the globe looking at technology and different solutions. Interoperability, information quality and privacy protections are going to be critical factors to work through. It is beginning to emerge that in the New Zealand context, obligations on inbound travellers should drive them to supply their travel credentials (including their health status) digitally so that the information can be “pushed” to whomever requires it in order for risk to be managed and

⁴ New Zealand is a signatory to the Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation which brought into being ICAO and comprises 19 annexes containing the SARPs of the international civil aviation.

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information to be independently verified by Government – for example, Customs and Immigration authorities; and the airline itself. There may also be the need for some manual processing for travellers without a smart phone or other digital means to account for countries that do not have a digital means of verification.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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22. IATA is developing an app for travellers called, Travel Pass. It is pitched as a global and standardised way for countries to validate and authenticate all country regulations regarding COVID-19 passenger travel requirements. Travel Pass users will be able to create a digital health wallet linked to their e-passport. Once travellers have been tested and/or vaccinated, labs will securely send the results to the individual's app. It then checks destination country requirements for travel against the results data and advises customers if they meet those travel requirements or not.

23. [REDACTED]
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24. It remains unclear yet how that authenticated data can be made available to governments so that they can authenticate and gain assurance that people are eligible to travel to their country.

Air New Zealand IATA Travel Pass trial

25. Air New Zealand, as well as other airlines such as Emirates and Qantas are trialling the IATA Travel Pass app. The Air New Zealand trial is due to kick off on 20 April outbound from Auckland to Sydney. It is working with a lab in NZ providing PCR testing for outbound, and a large lab chain in Australia for inbound. The airlines expectation is that it will test the end-to-end technology and operational processes, from downloading the app, presenting at the lab and validating identity with passport, entering flight details, receiving a green "Okay to Travel" tick connected to the individual's test credential and that specific flight, and finally presenting to the airline team at the airport.

26. [REDACTED]

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We will brief you on the Programme over the coming months

27. [REDACTED]

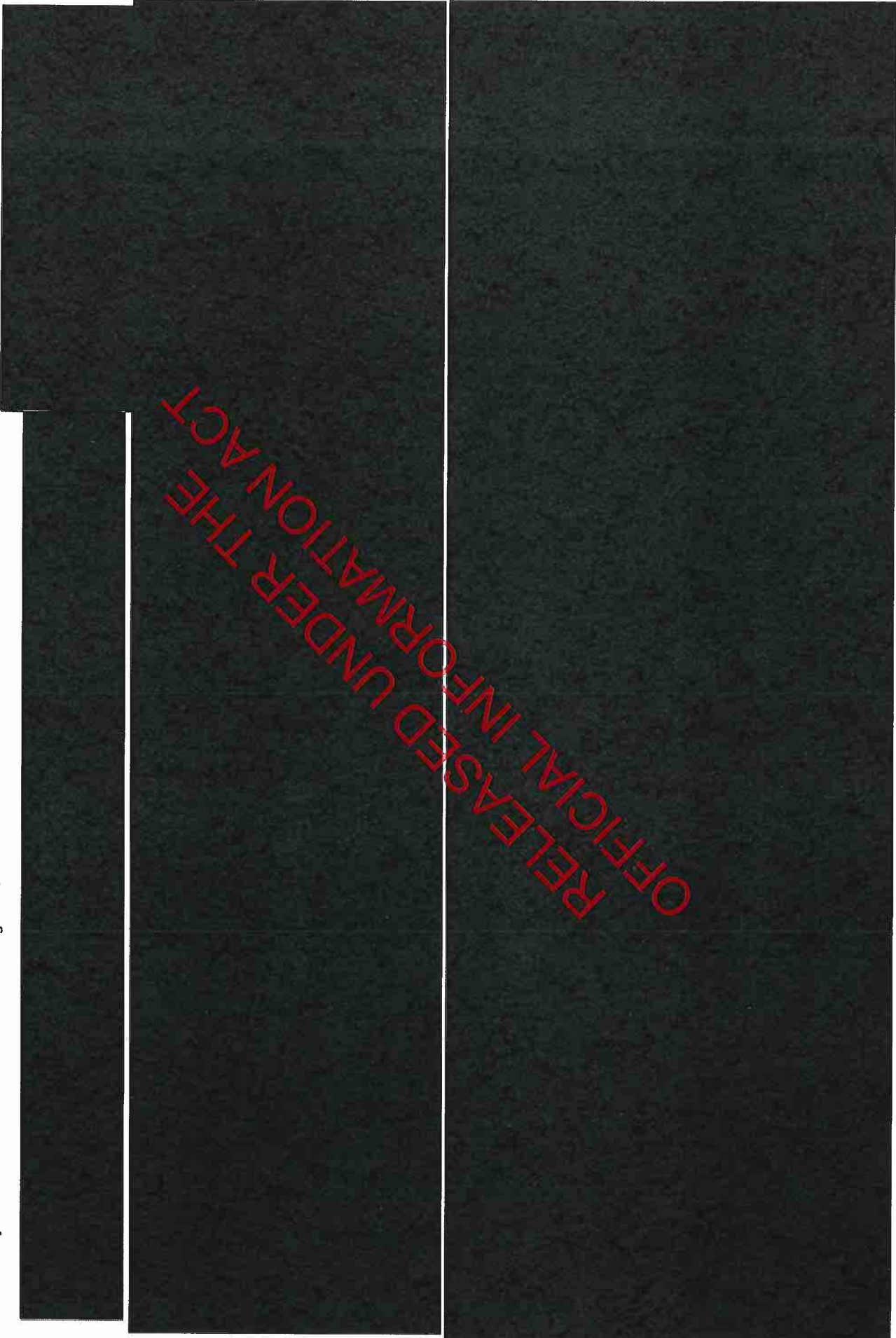
28. [REDACTED]

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Annex 1 – Key features of the Travel Health Pass Work Programme



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Annex 2 – Public facing key messages

- Travel in a post-COVID world is going to look different and not every country will have the same entry rules.
- Vaccines will almost certainly change the face of COVID-19 border management.
- The ideal end state for most countries is to get widespread vaccination coverage at home so they can begin to open their borders with minimal risk of sparking community transmission.
- But widespread vaccination coverage is likely to be some time away for most countries and probably a lot longer for developing countries.
- In the meantime, the global community is actively discussing the need for a verifiable COVID-19 vaccination certificate to help facilitate international travel.
- It is likely that many countries will look for proof of a traveller's COVID-19 vaccination status and confirmation they meet health conditions of entry such as having a pre-departure COVID-19 test.
- This may also determine whether a person can enter a country with reduced or lifted quarantine or testing requirements.
- A number of countries worldwide are investigating how to store and share vaccination certificates digitally. This may include what vaccine a traveller has had, when they had it, and who it was administered by, and is attached to a person's verifiable identity. This will help to give assurance that documents are legitimate and not fake or counterfeit.
- Vaccine certificates for the purposes of travel have many other names including travel health passes, or vaccine passports but at the heart of all of them is a verifiable vaccination or COVID-19 test certificate. We too are looking into this as this work very much fits in the wider discussion about our border reopening.
- The travel health pass needs to be in a form that is easily available and usable by travellers so they can share their vaccination or testing information to whomever requires it – for example, Customs and Immigration authorities; and the airlines.
- We are working through how we can create a travel health pass via a new or existing platform that can be accessed, shared, or provided by New Zealanders and travellers when they need to so they can travel overseas with confidence.
- As vaccination rollout continues globally and domestically we will also need to have systems in place to assess the vaccination credentials of travellers coming into New Zealand to keep our country safe at the border. This could be in the form of an app. Nevertheless, whatever the forms are, digital or physical, we want it to be as user friendly as possible.
- As nations continue to roll out their COVID-19 vaccination programmes, everyone wants to be able to travel safely and have trust and confidence in our vaccination systems and processes.

Questions you may be asked and suggested responses

What is it called?

- There have been a number of terms used to describe a Travel Health Pass. These include the terms Travel Pass, Green Travel Passport, digital vaccine certificate and Vaccine Passport.
- In a digital context, these are known as verifiable credentials. A Travel Health Pass is one potential use case of these. The implications of having these, and their implicit endorsement may have significant potential impacts on New Zealand and global society, including potential impacts on personal freedoms, sovereignty and international commerce.

What is a Travel Health Pass?

- The travel health pass will hold a traveller's COVID-19 vaccination status to help prove they meet health conditions of entry by New Zealand and other countries.
- There may be a number of solutions world-wide and the key is that they can interact with each other.
- This information could be held on a person's phone, stored in a secure app which a person can choose to share with government agencies like Customs, Immigration authorities or airlines before entering a country.
- The information held is likely to be similar to what you have on your passport and include other pieces of information, like your vaccination status, your national health index number which is administered by the Ministry of Health.
- We understand that some people may not be able to produce a digital travel health pass and therefore we will be working to ensure a physical 'travel health pass' will be available.

Why do we need it?

- The roll-out of vaccines internationally and here in New Zealand will enable us to gradually begin to open up our borders, but we need to ensure that any steps that ease our border restrictions do not compromise the health and safety of New Zealanders.
- In time, verifiable proof of vaccination may be a tool that enables us to allow reduced or lifted quarantine and screening requirements for international travellers
- It is important that we work with the global community to develop a digital solution for these travel health passes, to avoid the risk of counterfeit paper based certificates that can be fraudulently obtained.
- There have been examples of people overseas buying a COVID-19 test or vaccine certificate at the airport or from the dark web.
- It's really important to me that the team of five million is not let down by someone who travels to or from New Zealand on a dodgy COVID-19 test or vaccine certificate.
- The travel health pass will benefit New Zealanders wanting to travel offshore and those that want to come to our country.
- The use of travel health passes that can be verified by countries worldwide will help to give confidence that it is safe to travel and have others visit our beautiful country.
- We are working on securing the best level of confidence in our vaccination records and systems to secure the best travel opportunities for New Zealanders.

Where is this work presently?

- Travel in a post-COVID world is going to look different and not every country will have the same entry rules, or measures such as quarantine and specific testing arrangements. As you can imagine designing a system of this complexity will take some time and will need to be thoroughly tested.
- There is still a lot of work that needs to be done, from both a technical end and a policy end.

Why don't we need the Travel Health Pass for travel with Australia?

- New Zealand and Australia enjoy a very close relationship and cooperate extremely effectively on international travel matters. Both countries are fairly early on in their vaccination programmes which as you would expect is a strong focus for both countries.
- With the launch of quarantine free travel, a lot of work has gone in to ensuring that the relevant parts of the systems for quarantine free travel are linked up and connected as needed. I have the confidence that quarantine free travel will operate smoothly without the travel pass in place.

What type of work is needed to develop a travel health pass?

- Government agencies are still working through what the end-to-end process will look like from booking your ticket to landing overseas. As you can imagine there are a number of steps that need to be worked through and a number of different parties involved to ensure any new process is as streamlined as possible.
- One area that we will be focussing on is data requirements and the user experience. This will include how we maintain a traveller's information privacy, how we integrate any data requirements with systems and processes from overseas, and what existing apps/platforms we can use to securely store a person's travel health information.

What are the challenges?

There are a number of challenges we need to work through before we stand-up any travel health pass, including:

- Designing a process that is easy to use from a traveller's perspective and covers from when they book to when they land overseas.
- Ensuring the system has controls in place around data privacy, security and any ethical issues with personal health information on a travel health pass
- Having a process and system that enables New Zealand's systems to work with those being used overseas.

Internationally there are a number of government-backed and private sector initiatives for digital travel health pass platforms. Many of these have reached the critical mass point, and a New Zealand system will need to be able to work with these other platforms.

It's also not just about system design. The work includes meeting the cost of standing up whatever the new services will be with resources adequate enough to ensure that passengers are cleared from airports in a safe and timely manner.

There is a significant equity risk with requiring these. Those who can't be vaccinated will be impacted if we aren't careful about how we proceed. We also need to be careful that these do not become a de-facto pass for New Zealanders to go about their business.

What about if people try and provide fake health credentials to game the system?

- Any information housed on the travel health pass will need to be verified by government agencies domestically and internationally. This may include being able to know what vaccine a traveller has had, when they had it and who it was administered by. This will also need to be bound to a traveller or person's identity. This will help to give assurance that we are not having travellers arrive in New Zealand with fake or counterfeit details.
- However, there is always a risk of fraud and people wanting to game the system. We will be working hard to ensure that this doesn't happen.

How will the Government prevent counterfeits?

- The Government will use standard encryption and security protocols to ensure that any person's travel health pass is trustworthy. We will continue to work with other jurisdictions to understand their respective security controls and how their travel passes work to ensure they can be trusted by the New Zealand government.

What work has the government done in the international space?

- I'm really proud we are on the verge of opening quarantine free travel with Australia and also looking at opening up to some of our Pacific Realm countries (for example, Cook Islands and Niue), and while some people say it's taken too long, I'm comfortable in the timeline it has been delivered.
- Another key point is New Zealand cannot go at this alone. While we may be ready to travel the globe, many of the desired destinations are still fighting COVID-19 and their priority is protecting their citizens and reducing the death toll.
- At the same time we must still protect our own borders, we cannot forfeit the sacrifices we have made to keep New Zealand safe from COVID.
- Internationally we have been engaging with other countries and organisations for some time including the World Health Organisation, the International Civil Aviation Organisation and other key travel and trade partners. We are doing this to ensure whatever process we have in place aligns and can be integrated with other countries.
- There is precedent for a WHO-led international vaccine certificate system. In the past vaccine certificates for cholera and smallpox have been required for international travel, and today some countries still require proof of yellow fever vaccination.

What about the Air NZ trial?

- Air NZ is currently working with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to trial the IATA digital Travel Pass app on Air NZ's Auckland-Sydney and Sydney-Auckland route.
- With constantly changing entry and departure testing and paperwork requirements, the airline wants to streamline the health verification process to help customers know what they need to take their next international trip safely.
- That work is continuing and we expect a report back from the airline to government agencies in mid-May.

Why this work is so important?

- Securing the best travel freedoms for New Zealand citizens could come down to having the right systems and processes in place that integrate with other countries overseas.
- There are a variety of different proposals and approaches for travel health passes currently being developed overseas. We are actively considering what the best approach is for us while keeping in line with best practice.
- In addition to working with the International Air Transport Association (IATA), we are continuing to engage with the World Health Organization (WHO) on work it is taking forward on the development of global standards for digital vaccine certification. As the United Nations specialised technical agency responsible for coordinating global health issues, the WHO has a key role to play here.
- We are also closely following the work in International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) as it sets international Standards and Recommendations Practices for civil aviation within the United Nation system. This includes things like formalities for clearing aircraft with respect to the requirements of customs. As 99% of overseas travel to New Zealand is by air, how the aviation system interacts with the international vaccine rollout will be of critical importance to us.

Will the public have to use this for travel into or out of NZ?

- It is still too early to understand what the requirements may include. We also need to keep in line with other countries and their requirements for travel.
- A large aspect of this work is to understand the requirements across an entire traveller's journey, from when you book until when you board.

I'm worried I will be discriminated against by being unable to travel/ What do I do if I cannot get vaccinated?

Not everyone can get vaccinated and some may choose not to be vaccinated. As borders begin to open up overseas, it is possible that some countries may treat travellers differently depending on their vaccination status, (such as different quarantine or testing requirements). A key aspect of the travel health pass work will be to help ensure that New Zealand secures the best travel freedoms for New Zealand citizens, while doing all we can to keep our own country and other countries safe from COVID-19.

Annex 3 – Wider Strategic Context

- The Travel Health Pass work comes within the wider Reconnecting New Zealand Framework being led by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- The Framework recognises that New Zealand has taken a health based approach to managing COVID-19 -both in preventing COVID-19 border incursion, and managing the risk of community outbreak as it has occurred. This has been the best way to protect ourselves, and our people.

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