

SA's vaccine programme: Let's keep the momentum going to facilitate travel

By [Otto de Vries](#)

6 Aug 2021

After a slow and challenging start, South Africa's vaccine roll-out is finally picking up speed. The 35- to 49-year-old age group reacted positively to the news that they could finally get their jabs - with over a million candidates registering in one weekend.

The 18+ age group will soon follow suit as they have received the nod for Covid jabs from September.

According to President Cyril Ramaphosa, the number of vaccinations administered in South Africa has passed the 7.5 million mark, with around three million people already fully vaccinated.



Source: Mohammad Shahhosseini via [Unsplash](#)

This positive development couldn't come at a better time as an increasing number of countries worldwide are lifting travel restrictions for fully vaccinated travellers.

But, as travellers are excited about the prospect of their newfound freedom of movement, it can be frustrating to find that in many cases, a negative Covid test certificate is still required for travel.

Leaders around the world are meeting at length to discuss the details of travel guidelines. However, the reality should be straightforward: anyone who is vaccinated should be free to travel without additional restrictions, including additional testing or quarantine. For those who are not vaccinated or only partially vaccinated, a negative PCR test should be presented.

The time has also come to do away with the traffic light 'colour-coding' of countries according to their Covid risk. The UK, for example, has already announced it was planning to scrap the need to quarantine for those who are double-jabbed and travelling from amber countries. But it has not set out how it will work, when it will happen, and whether unvaccinated children would also be able to avoid quarantine if their parents are fully vaccinated. This has created further confusion and frustration.

To those destinations wishing to welcome back tourists and travellers, I implore you to say goodbye to national red, amber and green lists.

Of course, certified and reliable proof of vaccination will be necessary for travellers to move freely. The European Union (EU) recently implemented a Digital Green Certificate – equipped with a digital signature in the form of a scannable QR code – which is used to prove a traveller's vaccination status, allowing for free movement between member states.

Similarly, vaccinated South Africans will need access to the EVDS (electronic vaccination data system) to obtain their personal vaccination data (linked to their ID). This will allow them to share this information with airlines, cruise lines, suppliers of travel services and relevant port authorities via an approved digital vaccination certificate/ pass/ app. The digital vaccination certificate will need to be issued according to ICAO released VDS standards.

These standards are recognised by airlines and countries signatory to the Chicago Convention, including South Africa.

Many markets have indicated that they will not accept the paper-based vaccination record card issued by vaccination centres in South Africa. To open up travel, an electronic system will need to be put in place with easy access to vaccination status and PCR test results.

The EVDS is certainly not 'mission impossible' for South Africa. A public/private sector partnership can ensure a quick and affordable rollout. What is urgently needed is for the Department of Health to open access to our vaccination data. Inter-ministerial co-operation between the Departments of Tourism, Transport, Health and Home Affairs is essential, and a custodian needs to be appointed as a matter of urgency.

The future is bright, but we need to keep the momentum going to open up travel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Otto de Vries is CEO of Asata.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>