

USE OF THE COVID-19 DIGITAL CERTIFICATE FOR ACCESS TO LEISURE ACTIVITIES AND OTHER INDOOR SPACES

SCIENTIFIC TECHNICAL, PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLANS AND PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSION

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At its meeting held on November 19, the Warning and Preparedness and Response Plans Committee assessed the use of the COVID certificate for access to certain activities, mainly those related to leisure and others to be carried out indoors, especially in those areas where it is not possible to wear a mask at all times. The following are the main aspects that have been assessed in favor and against its implementation:

Aspects in favor:

- Incentivize vaccination of some people who have not yet received the recommended guidelines.
- Convey the message that there is still a risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection, and that the population has the perception that measures to reduce this risk are still necessary. It could imply a reinforcement of prevention and control measures in risk areas.
- This measure is already being applied in some Autonomous Communities and has judicial backing.
- Stimulate that the need for vaccination continues to be assumed by the population as a measure of social responsibility.

Aspects against:

- **There is no evidence that this measure has an effect on reducing SARS-CoV-2 transmission. In European countries where it is being used, cases are increasing significantly, although it is true that their vaccination coverage is much lower than in Spain. It is foreseeable that the effect in Spain, with higher coverage, will be even less. Moreover, the effectiveness of this measure would be difficult to assess.**
- **It does not really reflect immune status. It equates being vaccinated with being immunized and this does not fit reality. Vaccination prevents severe forms of the disease in a very important way (90 to 99% against hospitalization, 90 to 95% against mortality¹), but the effectiveness in preventing infection and mild forms of disease is much lower, about 60%. We know that approximately 40% of those vaccinated are susceptible to becoming infected and transmitting the infection. Therefore, its usefulness in preventing transmission would be very limited and could even have a negative impact if prevention measures were relaxed.**

¹ Public Health England. SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern and variants under investigation in England. Technical briefing 23. 17 September 2021

- There is a clear risk that its use, may lead to the relaxation of prevention measures indoors, (especially a decrease in the use of the mask), as these people feel more protected by being in an environment in which the certificate has been required (vaccination, history of infection in the previous 180 days or PDIA negative in the last 48 hours). It has also been seen in studies of vaccine effectiveness that, when the index case and its contacts are vaccinated, there are more infections due to a greater relaxation of measures than if the contacts are not vaccinated.
- Difficult to implement in an operational manner. It would also be necessary to request personal identification each time it is requested to ensure that it corresponds to the person who is using it.
- In Spain, approximately 90% of those over 12 are vaccinated, so the gain in vaccination coverage would not be very important. Studies carried out² recently refer to an increase in vaccination coverage mainly in people under 20 years of age who, in our country, have very high coverage, around 84%, therefore, it would not be justified for this purpose.
- The coverage achieved in Spain would hardly justify the cost and the negative implications that this measure may have.
- **IT SHOULD BE ENSURED THAT IT DOES NOT GENERATE SITUATIONS OF INEQUITY.**
- If the incidence continues to rise, and it is very likely that it will, it is possible that it will end up generating more distrust in public institutions.

In addition, it should be taken into account that the measures that have proven to be effective in preventing transmission are the use of the mask and, if the epidemiological situation is unfavorable, the adoption of restrictive measures, especially indoors (ensuring their capacity, improving ventilation, time limitations ...). If the COVID certificate were used, these should be prioritized.

Scientific Technical Committee Of The Ministry Of Health sees more justified the request for this classification in health and socio-sanitary centers, both for visitors and for workers (taking into account the labor aspects of this measure), or in specific areas such as prisons, since this is where there is an important group of vulnerable people.

In case of use, assess where it could have a real utility (places where the use of a mask cannot be guaranteed) and at what times (it should be assessed if it would be more effective at certain levels of alert). If it is decided to apply, it should be done before December celebrations (December bridge and Christmas holidays).

²The impact of mandatory COVID-19 certificates on vaccine uptake: Synthetic Control Modelling of Six Countries. Melinda C. Mills, PhD* (ORCID: 0000-0003-1704-0001) and Tobias Rüttenauer, PhD (ORCID: 0000-0001-5747-9735)

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