The implications of immunity certification

Dr Richard Milne
richard.milne@wgc.org.uk
COVID-19: Government Response Stringency Index, May 27, 2020

The Government Response Stringency Index is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest response).

Note: This index simply records the number and strictness of government policies, and should not be interpreted as 'scoring' the appropriateness or effectiveness of a country's response.
OurWorldinData.org/coronavirus • CC BY
Cambridgeshire

Retail and recreation
-54% compared to baseline

Supermarket and pharmacy
-16% compared to baseline

Parks
+44% compared to baseline

Public transport
-48% compared to baseline

Workplaces
-51% compared to baseline

Residential
+20% compared to baseline
NBA players can wear smart rings to detect COVID-19 symptoms when season returns

Help the NHS stop the spread of coronavirus in the UK

This app can let you know if you may have been near someone with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms.

Learn more about how it works.
NHS not ready to begin mass testing

Coronavirus: Boris Johnson vows more virus tests as UK deaths exceed 2,000

Coronavirus: NHS to ramp up testing capacity
6.3%
"We are looking at an immunity certificate – how people who have had the disease, have got the antibodies and therefore have the immunity, can show that and so get back, as much as possible, to normal life,"

(Matt Hancock 2/4/20)

The value of immunity certification

Economic  Social  Ethical
“Victory had perched upon my banner; I was an acclimated citizen, and as such, received into full favor in the good city of New-Orleans, where they distrust every body, and call them non-residents, until they become endorsed by the yellow fever.”

(Roanoke in Olivarius)

“If a man intends to make himself a citizen of New Orleans, his first duty is to become acclimated. He owes it to himself and to society.”

(Picayune 1841 in Olivarius 2019)

Discrimination

Equity

Perverse incentives

Evidence
Evidence quality

Evidence about the diagnostic accuracy of Covid-19 serology tests is characterised by high risks of bias, heterogeneity, and limited generalisability to point-of-care testing and to outpatient populations.


© 2020 BMJ Publishing group Ltd.

At this point in the pandemic, there is not enough evidence about the effectiveness of antibody-mediated immunity to guarantee the accuracy of an “immunity passport” or “risk-free certificate.”

(WHO, 24 April)

“I know we all want it to be true that if we have antibodies it will then mean we are free to do things others are not...but at the moment ... if we have an antibody test, what it tells you is that you have antibodies.”

(Dido Harding, 11/6/20)
Conclusions

- Immunity passports are one a range of approaches being considered by governments and companies
- May enable restoration of economic and social freedoms
- May exacerbate existing inequalities, and present risks to individuals and to public health efforts
- Accuracy and implications of antibody testing are not fully understood
- Despite this, there may nevertheless be a market for testing if any privilege is seen to be associated with it
Further reading