

# China pioneers 'virus passports' as EU gets Russia jab boost

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Chinese citizens can download a certificate showing their vaccination status and test results and use it to enter and leave the country

China has launched a system of "virus passports" to kickstart international travel, as Russia sealed its first deal on Tuesday to

manufacture the Sputnik V jab in the European Union.

While other nations like Brazil and Mexico are still struggling to get the pandemic under control, Chinese citizens can download the new certificates and use them to enter and leave the country.

Hailed as the world's first virus passport—similar schemes are also under discussion in the United States and the EU—but the Chinese scheme is not mandatory.

Furthermore, as it is only available for Chinese citizens, it is not yet clear how it could work internationally.

Europe, by contrast, is still struggling to step up its rollout, even if officials promise 100 million shots will enter the EU each month from April to June.

The EU's industry commissioner Thierry Breton said Tuesday that the bloc's vaccine strategy should this week be augmented with the addition of Johnson & Johnson's single-shot jab.

With approval expected "within the next, hopefully, days or hours," he said, that would bring the number of vaccines in use across the 27 member states to four, on top of ones from BioNTech/Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca.

# Covid-19

World toll Tuesday March 9, at 1100 GMT

Deaths	New	Cases	New
2,600,802	6,498	117,063,385	299,273

New: 24-hour increase on Monday March 8

## Hardest-hit countries

	Deaths	New (latest report)	Cases
UNITED STATES	525,816	749	29,045,448
BRAZIL	266,398	987	11,051,665
MEXICO	190,923	319	2,130,477
INDIA	157,930	77	11,244,786
UNITED KINGDOM	124,566	65	4,223,232

Toll of coronavirus infections and deaths worldwide and in worst-affected countries based on AFP tallies, as of March 9 at 1100 GMT

## 'Propaganda'

The EU was given an additional boost, with an announcement that 10 million doses of the Sputnik V jab would be produced in Italy in the second half of 2021.

While Russia's provision of the shots around the world, including to some smaller EU countries, has been a coup for Moscow's image, European Council president Charles Michel accused Moscow "propaganda", using "highly limited but widely publicised operations to supply vaccines".

Nevertheless, Sputnik V's makers demanded an apology from the EU's medicines regulator after a senior official warned member states against hastily authorising the jab, comparing emergency rollouts to "Russian roulette".

The United States, the worst-hit country in the world, is also accelerating its vaccine roll-out, with the states of New York and Florida preparing to make COVID-19 vaccines available to people aged 60 and over.

### **'Anti-vax hysteria'**

Much of the world is still struggling to break the grip of a pandemic that has killed more than 2.6 million people in a little over a year.

More than 700,000 people have now lost their lives in Latin America and the Caribbean, with Brazil and Mexico accounting for the lion's share of deaths.



Latin America has struggled with the virus and has just passed the milestone of 700,000 deaths

In France, intensive care units at hospitals in the Paris region are nearly saturated with COVID-19 patients, health authorities warned, and doctors are now putting off non-urgent operations in order to free up more beds.

But there has been some progress in Africa, where Sudan became the latest country to begin inoculating health workers using shots received through the Covax initiative.

Tunisia also received its first major delivery of coronavirus vaccine

doses Tuesday, almost a month later than expected, paving the way for the start of its inoculation campaign this week.

A day after International Women's Day, World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that violence against women "has been exacerbated by the pandemic"—although it was already "endemic in every country and culture".

## **COVID disinformation**

Worldwide, nearly one in three women and girls over the age of 15—around 736 million people—have suffered violence at some time in their lives, mostly at the hands of intimate partners according to a WHO report.

Countries around the globe are also suffering disinformation attacks, with the Czech Republic especially exposed to false social media claims that vaccines can "change your DNA" or panic-inducing stories of seniors dying en masse after receiving the jab.

After years of immigration lies, "COVID arrived, and the amount of disinformation just exploded," Bohumil Kartous, a spokesman for a network that aims to battle disinformation, told AFP.

In Ukraine, Health Minister Maksym Stepanov said the low number of people—19,000—who have been vaccinated in the first two weeks of the country's push was down to "anti-vax hysteria" against the Covishield vaccine, an Indian-made version of the AstraZeneca jab.



In Milan, one of Europe's wealthiest cities, hundreds queue up every day at two distribution centres to get charity food parcels

### **'Rock bottom'**

The virus and the severe restrictions imposed to battle its spread have crushed global economic growth and plunged millions into poverty.

But economic forecasters are slowly beginning to see signs of a recovery—thanks to a huge stimulus package expected to soon clear the US Congress and the continuing rollout of vaccines.

The Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development says it now expects the global economy to grow by 5.6 percent this year, an increase of 1.4 points from its December forecast.

A rebound can't come soon enough for many economies, with South Africa—the continent's most industrialised nation—booking its first annual contraction in 11 years in 2020, shrinking seven percent according to official data released Tuesday.

In the wealthy Italian city of Milan, hundreds are queueing every day for charity food parcels.

"I'm ashamed to be here. But otherwise I would have nothing to eat," 60-year-old Giovanni Altieri told AFP.

"I'm at rock bottom here. I have no income and live off my savings."

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