

UK eyes testing out COVID-19 passports at mass gatherings

April 4 2021, by Sylvia Hui



People enjoy the sunny weather in Sefton Park in Liverpool, England, Sunday April 4, 2021. During current coronavirus restrictions people are allowed to meet up and exercise in the open air. (Peter Byrne/PA via AP)

Britain is planning to test a series of measures including "coronavirus

status certifications" over the coming weeks to see if they can allow people to safely return to mass gatherings at sports arenas, nightclubs and concerts.

People attending a range of events, including conferences and soccer's FA Cup, will need to be tested both before and after. The trials will also gather evidence on how ventilation and different approaches to social distancing could enable large events to go ahead.

Officials are also developing plans to trial COVID-19 passports that are expected to show if a person has received a vaccine, has recently tested negative for the virus, or has some immunity due to having tested positive in the previous six months.

The issue of vaccine passports has been a hotly debated topic around the world, including in the United States and Israel. The question is how much governments, employers, venues and other places have a right to know about a person's virus status. Many disagree over what the right balance is between a person's right to medical privacy and the collective right of people in groups not to be infected with a dangerous disease by others.

Some critics also say such vaccine passports will enable discrimination against poor people and impoverished nations that do not have ready access to vaccines.



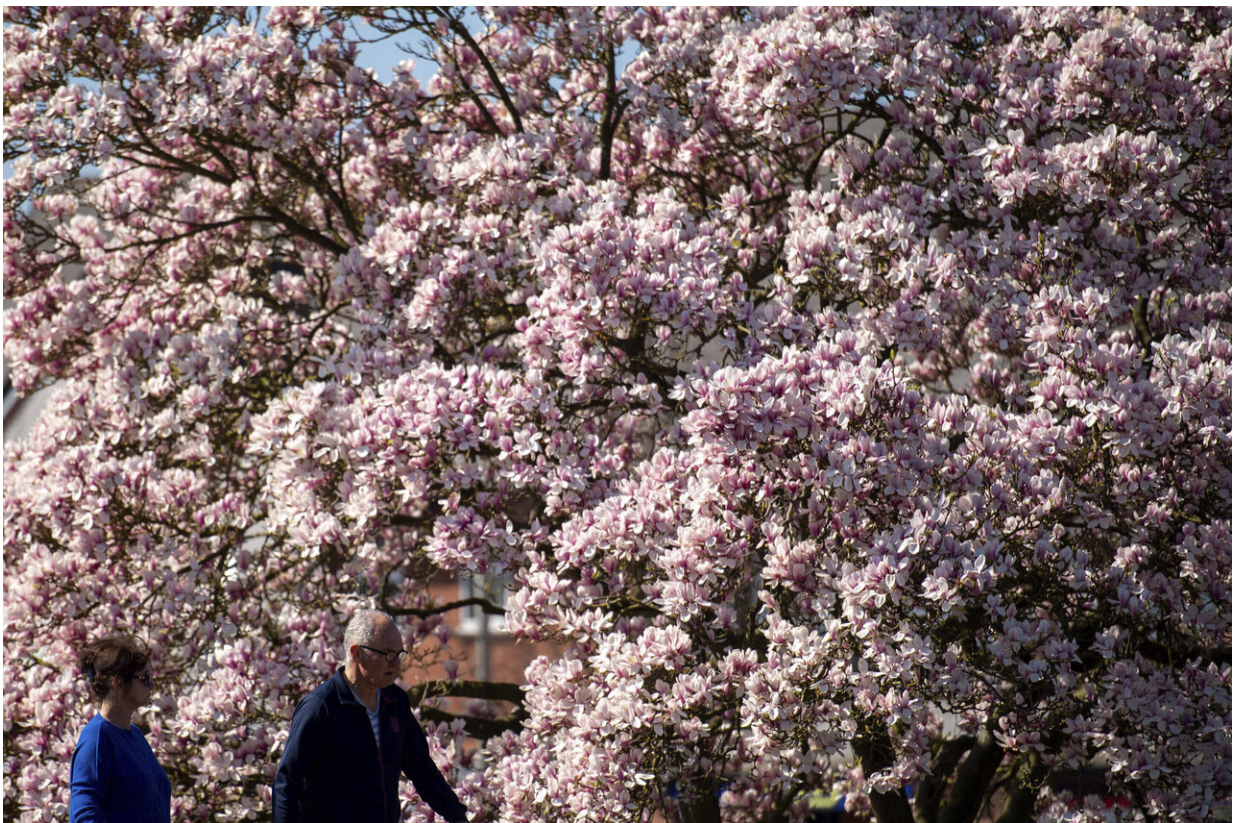
People enjoy a fine spring day in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, Sunday April 4, 2021. During current coronavirus restrictions people are allowed to meet up and exercise in the open air. (Jacob King/PA via AP)

Authorities in Britain have said the passes could involve the use of an app or paper certificates for those who don't have access to the digital option.

But U.K. Sports Minister Nigel Huddleston stressed to reporters that "the earliest pilots almost certainly won't involve any elements of certification" but will involve testing before and after the events. Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to set out more details about the coronavirus passports on Monday.

"We are doing everything we can to enable the reopening of our country so people can return to the events, travel and other things they love as safely as possible, and these reviews will play an important role in allowing this to happen," Johnson said.

Dozens of British lawmakers, including some from Johnson's own Conservative Party, have opposed the plans.



People walk by a blooming tree on a fine spring day in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, Sunday April 4, 2021. During current coronavirus restrictions people are allowed to meet up and exercise in the open air. (Jacob King/PA via AP)

Cabinet minister Michael Gove, who has led the [task force](#) responsible

for drawing up the plans, acknowledged that vaccine passports raised "a host of practical and ethical questions" which needed to be resolved before any wider rollout.

Officials said the trial events include the FA Cup semi-final at London's Wembley Stadium later this month with a crowd of 4,000 in a stadium that seats 90,000, and the event's final on May 15, with a crowd of 21,000. Other events include the World Snooker Championship in Sheffield, central England and a comedy club gathering.

The news about the trials came as businesses including pubs, restaurants, nonessential shops and hairdressers prepared to welcome back customers as restrictions ease in England. Officials say about 47% of the country's population has had a first dose of the [coronavirus](#) vaccine, and more than 5 million people in the U.K. have received their second dose.



People jog past the 'The National COVID Memorial Wall' on the south bank of the Thames in front of St. Thomas' hospital and opposite the House of Parliament in London, Sunday April 4, 2021. Hearts are being drawn onto the wall in memory of the many thousands of people who have died in the UK from coronavirus, with organizers hoping to reach their target of 150,000 hearts by the middle of next week. (AP Photo/Tony Hicks)



A close up of the hearts on the 'The National COVID Memorial Wall' on the south bank of the Thames in front of St. Thomas' hospital and opposite the House of Parliament in London, Sunday April 4, 2021. Hearts are being drawn onto the wall in memory of the many thousands of people who have died in the UK from coronavirus, with organizers hoping to reach their target of 150,000

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Families enjoy a boating lake in Finsbury Park as lockdown measures start to be relaxed in London, Friday, April 2, 2021. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)



Women draw hearts on the 'The National COVID Memorial Wall' on the south bank of the Thames in front of St. Thomas' hospital and opposite the House of Parliament in London, Sunday April 4, 2021. Hearts are being drawn onto the wall in memory of the many thousands of people who have died in the UK from coronavirus, with organizers hoping to reach their target of 150,000 hearts by the middle of next week. (AP Photo/Tony Hicks)



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Pigeons fly as a family enjoy a boating lake in Finsbury Park as lockdown measures start to be relaxed in London, Friday, April 2, 2021. (AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth)



People walk past a mural of Captain Tom Moore by by street artist Akse P19 in Manchester's North Quarter, England, Friday April 2, 2021. (Peter Byrne/PA via AP)



In this Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021 file photo, arriving passengers walk past a sign in the arrivals area at Heathrow Airport in London, during England's third national lockdown since the coronavirus outbreak began. The British government is gearing up to ban international arrivals from four more countries—Bangladesh, Kenya, Pakistan and the Philippines—amid concerns over new virus variants but opted against including France and other European nations facing a resurgence of the virus. The Department for Transport said Friday April 2, 2021 that the number of countries on its "red list" will reach 39 when the latest restrictions take effect in England beginning April 9. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham, File)

Johnson's government is also expected to set out its approach to easing restrictions on international travel next week. Media reports say when Britain's current ban on foreign holidays is lifted, a risk-based traffic light system with ratings for countries around the world will be

introduced and travellers will be required to quarantine accordingly.

More details are to be unveiled when a government task force on global travel reports on April 12. The government has said that international leisure travel cannot take place until mid-May at the earliest.

Last week the U.K. added four more nations to its red list of countries from which travel is banned except for U.K. citizens and those with residency rights. By April 9, the U.K. red list will be up to 39 countries. It aims to prevent more virus variants—especially ones first detected in Brazil and South Africa—from getting into the U.K.

Despite Britain's success on the vaccination front, it still has the highest reported COVID-19 death toll in Europe at around 127,000 deaths.

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