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Moscow's QR Code System for Restaurant Access, Explained

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Many Muscovites have expressed confusion with the city's new rules requiring restaurant patrons to show proof of vaccination or immunity. **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

Starting Monday, June 28, all restaurants and cafes in Moscow will require patrons to show a QR code proving full vaccination, a negative PCR test in the previous 72 hours, or proof of recovery from the coronavirus.

The unprecedented move is the city's latest effort to clamp down on a renewed surge in Covid-19 cases and deaths in Russia's capital driven by the highly contagious Delta variant. The city previously ordered all restaurants and bars to close after 11 p.m., a rule that is still in effect.

Many Muscovites have reported difficulties with the QR-code portal, particularly expats who don't have a Russian passport. Meanwhile, the city's restaurants and cafes reported a 90% drop in business on the first day the new rules were in place.

Here's what you need to know:

Am I eligible for a QR code?

The following categories are eligible for receiving a QR code:

1. People who have received both doses of an approved Covid-19 vaccine; currently, the only recognized vaccines in Russia are Sputnik V, EpiVacCorona, CoviVac and the one-dose Sputnik Light.
2. People who have recovered from a tested case of the coronavirus in the past six months.
3. People who have received a negative PCR test result in the previous 72 hours.

Those who received a non-Russian vaccine abroad such as Pfizer or AstraZeneca are not eligible for a QR code as a result.

How do I get the QR code?

QR codes are generated through the mos.ru city government portal. Applicants indicate whether they're a Russian citizen or a foreign citizen and fill in the required fields. If the applicants' information appears in the city health database, the QR code is immediately generated.

I have been vaccinated against Covid-19 with a Russian vaccine/tested negative on a PCR test, but I can't get a QR code.

Some have solved this problem by contacting or visiting the clinic where they were vaccinated with their passport and vaccination certificate. From there, clinic workers have printed out the QR code and handed it to the individual. This is especially common for those who received their vaccination several months ago.

I do not fall into any of the above categories, but I still want to support local businesses and eat out.

The QR code requirement currently only applies to patrons who dine or drink indoors. Those without a code are able to eat at restaurants and cafes with outdoor seating until July 12. Take-away is also available to all diners.

Restaurants and cafes still require patrons to wear masks and gloves to enter and may check your temperature upon entry.

What exemptions are there apart from outdoor/takeaway dining?

Hotel guests may eat indoors at restaurants and cafes directly associated with the hotel. In addition, children under 18 may eat indoors if they are with parents who have QR codes.

What do the QR codes look like, and what kind of information do they share?

QR codes are scanned by a smartphone upon entry. Once scanned, the codes will show the code status (invalid/valid), the visitor's initials, date of birth and passport number (if the code has been obtained from gosusligi.ru or the government), according to mos.ru.

The codes can be verified using a number of mobile apps, including My Moscow, Moscow State Services, Moscow Transport and Moscow Assistant.

Is it possible to get a fake QR code? Is it a good idea?

The Moscow Mayor's Office said fake QR codes have been selling for as much as 11,000 rubles on the black market in addition to counterfeit vaccination certificates. The Kremlin said it was aware of the situation and called for measures to crack down on the fake codes and certificates.

Russian Senator Andrei Klishas said Tuesday that using a fake QR code could be punishable by up to two years in prison for violating coronavirus-related sanitary restrictions.

Will the QR system spread elsewhere?

As of now, it's unclear.

Moscow city officials have suggested that the QR system could be expanded to include public transportation, shopping centers and other public places. We are still in the very early stages of this trail-blazing program, but it seems that this will be enforced strongly, particularly in chain restaurants and organizations.

Scannable "track and trace" programs are common, especially in the EU. It's not impossible that other cities or countries could follow in Moscow's footsteps, especially if the program is successful in lowering cases.

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