

First Russian Region Mandates Vaccine Passes for Internal Flights

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Maxim Kiselev / TASS

A Far East Russian region has become the first in the country to [introduce](#) vaccine passports for internal flights Wednesday as federal lawmakers race to mandate health passes for public transport and other areas amid a record-breaking wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

Starting Dec. 1, the Khabarovsk region 8,000 kilometers east of Moscow will require digital Covid passes for intra-regional flights as well as train rides.

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The region's Covid task force said Wednesday it has decided on the radical measures "without waiting for federal orders" as it battles a dramatic surge in weekly infections.

The scannable barcode passes known as QR codes show its holders' vaccination status or recent recovery from a confirmed Covid-19 infection.

"Questions related to the inconvenience of passengers do not correlate in any way with the number of deaths we're getting," the state-run RIA Novosti news agency quoted Yevgeny Nikonov, the region's deputy chairman on social issues, as saying.

Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, has said it plans to approve the government's bill mandating QR codes for public transport and restaurants this year.

Under the proposed legislation, restaurant-goers as well as air and train passengers will need to prove their vaccination or recent recovery with QR codes between Feb. 1 and June 1, 2022.

The Khabarovsk region's task force noted that Russia's Far Eastern Federal District leads all other regions in the rate of new infections while other territories see decreases after week-long paid holidays designed to curb the spread.

"The spread of Covid-19 is moving from west to east," it said in a statement announcing a range of vaccination measures.

Russia is one of the world's worst-hit countries with more than 9.1 million Covid cases and more than 259,000 officially registered deaths. A devastating fourth wave this fall has fueled record infections and deaths, with an all-time high 1,247 people dying in the past 24 hours.

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