

B.C., Quebec see jump in first COVID-19 doses after instituting vaccine-passport systems

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Quebec Health Minister Christian Dube shows an app on his phone as he announces details of the COVID-19 vaccination passport during a news conference, Aug. 10, 2021 in Montreal.

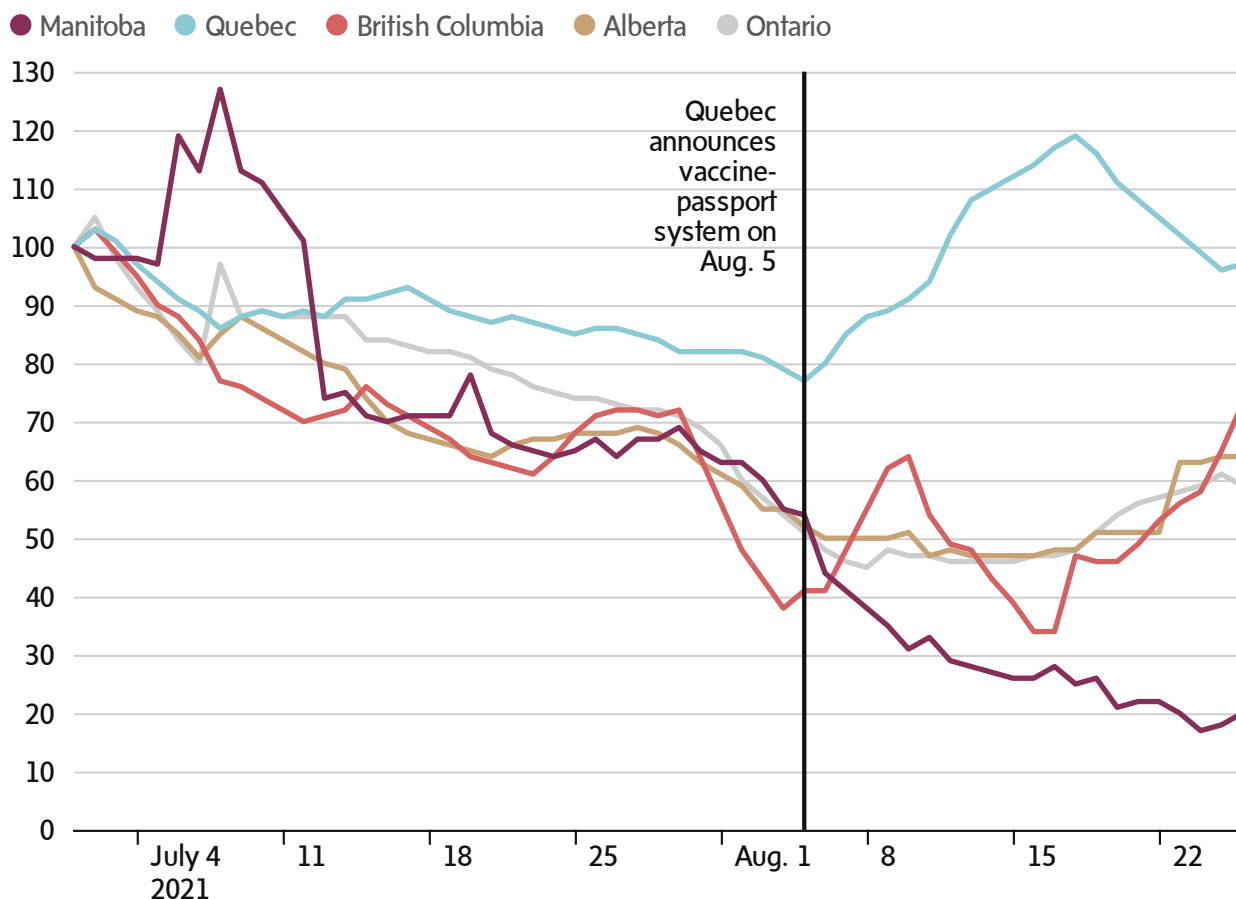
British Columbia and Quebec are seeing a surge in vaccination appointments after announcing residents won't be able to go to restaurants, gyms, cinemas and bars unless they're fully inoculated against COVID-19.

Since B.C. health officials announced the creation of the province's vaccine card on Aug. 23, registrations to receive first doses tripled in residents under the age of 40, going from 4,161 appointments on Monday and Tuesday of the previous week to 12,904 appointments this past Monday and Tuesday. In Quebec, the daily number of first doses given climbed from 5,437 on Aug. 5, the day Premier François Legault revealed the provincial passport, to 8,162 two weeks later.

In that time period, daily first doses administered in Quebec increased by 50 per cent, while Ontario's rate of first doses stayed flat and Alberta's decreased by 3 per cent. Alberta has rejected issuing vaccine passports, while Ontario is now planning to implement one, sources have told The Globe and Mail.

Daily vaccine first doses administered by province

7-day rolling average; indexed, 100 = July 1, 2021



The increases in vaccinations in B.C. and Quebec may not seem high, but experts say every additional inoculation matters as the country confronts a fourth wave driven by the highly contagious Delta variant. In most provinces, first-dose vaccination rates stalled in late June at a low of 60 per cent in Alberta and Saskatchewan and a high of 73 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador. Vaccine passports that limit the access of unvaccinated people to certain businesses and popular events are one tool some provinces are using to encourage more residents to get the shot.

Quebec and B.C. are following Prince Edward Island and Manitoba in implementing a provincial passport, while other jurisdictions continue to debate or reject them as a tool to tame the fourth wave and keep businesses and schools open.

An angry public is forcing timid governments to get tough with COVID-19 vaccine resisters

Canada needs a national vaccine passport, now. Quebec has the answer

Quebec, B.C. and Manitoba will restrict many social activities – including going to restaurants, bars, festivals, cinemas and gyms – to immunized people, while Manitoba’s immunization card will also allow holders to visit long-term care facilities and sit with members of different households in restaurants. The PEI pass allows travellers from out of province to skip the area’s mandatory quarantine. None of those provinces require the passport for access to essential services such as education or health care.

Quebec Health Ministry spokesman Robert Maranda said the province saw a rise in vaccination rates across all age groups since the Aug. 5 announcement, with the 12-29 demographic showing the biggest increase in uptake.

“We’re really satisfied with the response,” he said. Quebec has now vaccinated 76 per cent of all its residents with at least one dose, and 68 per cent with two.

“When we’re talking about young adults, for sure we saw a boost there ... They understand the importance of being vaccinated, and they don’t want to be denied a

social life.”



Quebec Health Ministry spokesman Robert Maranda said the province saw a rise in vaccination rates across all age groups since the Aug. 5 announcement, with the 12-29 demographic showing the biggest increase in uptake.

GRAHAM HUGHES/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Quebec reported 612 new cases on Friday, the highest single-day total in three months, and health officials reported that the Delta variant now accounts for more than half of cases in the province. Similarly, B.C. is routinely recording more than 600 cases a day, which was enough for the government to reinstate a mask mandate on Wednesday for the first time since July 1.

Mr. Maranda said Quebec residents appear to be receptive to the new vaccine passport, and that 87 per cent of people were willing to download the app and show the document on their phones in pilot trials. A separate survey from Leger and the Association for Canadian Studies found that 81 per cent of Quebec responders “strongly support” or “somewhat support” the passport.

The same survey showed that 76 per cent of Canadians outside of Quebec would support a similar passport in their jurisdiction. Federal Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau said Friday that, if re-elected, the Liberals would provide \$1-billion in funding to help all provinces create passports for people to prove they had been vaccinated. The federal government had already announced on Aug. 13 it would begin requiring vaccinations for all federal public servants, as well as train and air passengers, in the coming weeks.

Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland have yet to announce any type of vaccine passport, while Alberta has rebuffed calls to implement such a system. Details of the Ontario plan have yet to be worked out. Albertans will soon be able to print out a card to show they have been fully vaccinated, but the document will not grant holders extra privileges, said Justin Brattinga, spokesman for Jobs, Economy and Innovation Minister Doug Schweitzer.

“If an Albertan has received their two doses, they should be confident that the risks of serious health effects are exceedingly small,” he said in a statement on Thursday.

The absence of a provincial passport so far has spurred some Ontario municipalities and public-sector organizations to implement their own policies. On Thursday, the City of Toronto announced that its 37,660 Toronto Public Service employees will have to be immunized by Oct. 31 or undergo frequent testing, while the City of Mississauga will also follow the same measures for its 7,000 staffers.

But Ontario has introduced policies for certain sectors that the vaccine passports in B.C., Manitoba and Quebec do not cover, such as health care. In Quebec, employers will also not be permitted to make the possession of a vaccine passport a hiring criterion.

Some health experts in the province say that not using the provincial passport to make vaccines mandatory for all essential workers, and to access essential services, is a mistake.

Richard Gold, a professor of law and medicine at McGill University, said the current passport may have led to an initial boost in vaccinations, but that it will take more stringent measures – including requiring health care workers and educators to be immunized – to get the inoculation rate up to 90 per cent, which many experts say

could be necessary to stifle the Delta variant.

“This passport gives people a nudge,” he said. “The problem is, there are only so many people that will be nudged. There is only one solution left, and that’s a vaccine requirement.”

Dr. Gold said he thinks the provincial government is pandering to a loud minority by not implementing tighter measures.

Francois Beland, head of the Research Axis on Health Services at the Lady Davis Institute of the Jewish General Hospital and a professor in public health at the University of Montreal, isn’t sure the province should wield its vaccine-passport system to introduce stricter policies. More forceful measures run the risk of turning some people off from vaccination altogether, he said.

“The greater the coercion, the less the public debate becomes about the vaccine, and the more it becomes about the coercion itself,” Dr. Beland said.

With data analysis from Chen Wang

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