Top 5 Tips: Mitigating health risks at borders

Over recent decades, a growing number of governments have decided that border management should be handled as early as possible in the journey continuum – ideally before the passenger even boards the plane. Pre-clearance, as a result, is increasingly being adopted by border agencies. This benefits carriers, who have a duty to check passengers' right to travel, and face heavy fines for non-compliance. It also suits airports, who have no direct role in the border management process, but may well be blamed by passengers, even if it's ultimately an airline or a government issue.

While PUBLIC HEALTH has always been a responsibility for governments, the Covid-19 pandemic brought it right to the fore, especially in terms of managing international travel.

So what should you look for, when you're searching for ways to mitigate health risks at borders, and better safeguard passengers today and tomorrow?

01

Automate wherever possible

Automation reduces congestion and improves the passenger experience.

Covid-19 taught us – especially in the early stages – that in-person checks on passengers at the airport were sometimes unavoidable. But the goal should always be to perform as many of the necessary checks – health, immigration, security, etc – as far as possible ahead of time. Most passengers would rather do check-in and pre-clearance before arriving at the airport, and while we will never be able to reach 100%, we should aim for a large majority. Passengers should be able to easily upload their documents – for example passports or vaccination certificates – and enjoy a near-contactless experience once they get to the airport.

02

Collaboration between stakeholders

When everyone's working together, everyone wins.

Collaboration between airports, airlines and governments has been improving solidly for a number of years. During the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, however, amongst uncertainty and confusion, some progress was lost. But today we are seeing stakeholders pulling together again, and working to harmonize rules, processes, and procedures for the common good. When looking for ways to mitigate health concerns at borders, prioritize solutions that enable and leverage collaboration between all players.

03

Standardization and interoperability

Harmonizing digital vaccination credentials.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of standardization and interoperability, not just in managing passenger data and advance passenger information, but for health credentials too. Many initiatives were undertaken during the pandemic, and dozens if not hundreds of digital travel passes or health wallets were created in 2020 and 2021. In practice, however, very few were widely used, largely because different standards were in place in different countries, and credentials weren't interoperable. Standardization and interoperability of health credentials and health status information will play a vital role in maximizing passenger flow in airports, and improving the passenger experience.

04

Empower travelers

Giving passengers ownership and management of their data.

It works to everyone's advantage to give travelers more control over their journey, and a more direct relationship with their destination point. Passenger-friendly solutions should be implemented that make it easy for travelers to upload standardized, interoperable vaccine certificates. Passengers also want to feel in control of their personal information and to trust those they share it with. This is especially true for health data, which is not just more sensitive, but also subject to stricter rules about storage, use and sharing. Privacy can be protected with digital tools and solutions, which allows checks to be made that the information exists, and is valid for travel, without needing to see the information itself.

05

Look to the future

Be prepared for what's coming next.

Airports, airlines and border agencies have long been aware that epidemics present a systemic risk to smooth air travel, and have learned a great deal during the Covid-19 pandemic. They are looking at ways of making existing processes and documentation more efficient – for example through digitization of the WHO yellow vaccination card, as well as the increasing digitization of customs and/or immigration declarations. Airports, meanwhile, will become increasingly contactless. This will not just protect and safeguard the health of passengers and staff, but will also improve passenger flow and the passenger experience.

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