



No ‘vaccine passports’ in Florida, but you may need one to leave the U.S.

Mitch Perry

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Gov. Ron DeSantis signed legislation in St. Petersburg this week banning businesses from requiring customers to show proof that they’ve been vaccinated against COVID-19, but the issue of so-called vaccine passports may still matter to Floridians if they intend to travel internationally this summer.

“It’s about choice. It’s about freedom, and it’s about not living in a world where we’re policing each other like the governor said,” Zephyrhills Senate Republican Danny Burgess said this week after the bill signing.

But Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute’s Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies, says the bill takes away the freedom of choice for businesses.

“If you’re one of these small businesses or recreation venues, your choice has been taken away,” he says.

Florida is one of at least six states to pass a ban on vaccine passports, but Olson says that the Sunshine State has “gone further than any other state to restrict not just governments power to ask for vaccine credentials, but also private parties and that goes for universities.”

One local business operator who has spoken out against the idea of banning businesses from asking if their customers have been vaccinated is Judith Lisi, the president and CEO of the Straz Center for the Performing Arts in Tampa.

Lisi told [NPR](#) last month that she had been in the process of creating a plan to use vaccine passports when she learned of DeSantis’ decision.

"He's a pro-business proponent," Lisi told the network. "Why doesn't he allow businesses to do what we need to do then? The whole industry is relying on this. It's so frustrating."

Spectrum Bay News 9 attempted to speak with Lisi today, but a spokesman said she wasn’t available to comment.

Burgess, who sponsored the legislation in the Senate, said he received his second vaccination shot last Friday, and strongly believes that it's the right thing to do, But he says that that "we don't want to force people to get something that they're not comfortable getting."

No one in Florida is being forced to get the vaccination, but certain industries, such as U.S. the cruise ship industry, have made it clear that they intend to have the majority of their patrons vaccinated when they resume operations.

However, those cruise ship companies are calling for vaccine certificates, not passports, says Dr. Maureen Miller, an infectious disease epidemiologist and medical anthropologist with Columbia University.

"A passport contains a lot of personally identifying information, and the vaccine certificate is all about medical information – that you have indeed been vaccinated and the exact dose that you were vaccinated with and where and when, that's the only information that's included in these vaccine certificates and the World Health Organization would also like it to be described that way," she says.

A spokesman for the European Union said earlier this week that a program could be put in place by the end of June allowing vaccinated people from outside the bloc to travel to Europe.