

INTELLIGENCE NOTE



DHS-CWMD Intelligence: Increasing Awareness of Homeland Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Food, Agriculture, Veterinary, and other Health Security Threats, Risks, and Opportunities

Health Security

11 February 2021

(U//FOUO) COVID-19 Vaccination Certificates Probable Target of Counterfeiting

(U//FOUO) Countries' endorsement of a COVID-19 amendment to the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) is likely to trigger vaccination certificates becoming a target of counterfeiting by scammers. A COVID-19 Annex could be recommended for an amendment to the World Health Organization's (WHO) IHR, similar to yellow fever certificate protocols. The IHR states each country can establish a systematic management plan that creates opportunities to reduce risks known to threaten international health security. Current vaccination cards are primarily used as reminders for the individual's second shot, however fraudulent social media ads and historical examples provide insights of potential future forgery expansion should the IHR regulations expand to include a COVID-19 vaccination certificates.

- » (U) On 14 January 2021, the WHO convened for an Emergency Committee meeting to discuss IHR for COVID-19. The meeting focused on vaccination certificates for international travelers and requirements for a digital vaccination verification program.
- » (U) As an indication of future forgery activity, on 10 December 2020, scammers advertised replicas (See figure below) of United Kingdom's (UK) COVID-19 vaccination cards on two well-known social media platforms. Soon after, the videos and user accounts were removed for breaching community guidelines, according to a social media spokesperson. UK experts forecasted there may be a surge in fake vaccination cards demand, if people are offered preferential treatment in certain entertainment venues and businesses.
- » (U) According to an October 2020 WHO media report, upwards of 80 percent of yellow fever travel cards in Zimbabwe are counterfeit. Further scam investigations identified cards being sold to Ugandan travelers, who presented them and successfully traveled internationally from Entebbe International Airport. The scams involved a cartel of medical practitioners using intermediaries to avoid detection. Scammers exploiting vaccines shortages, economic disparities and anti-vaccination sentiment have resulted in countries working to develop a secure digital verification system.

International Health Regulation

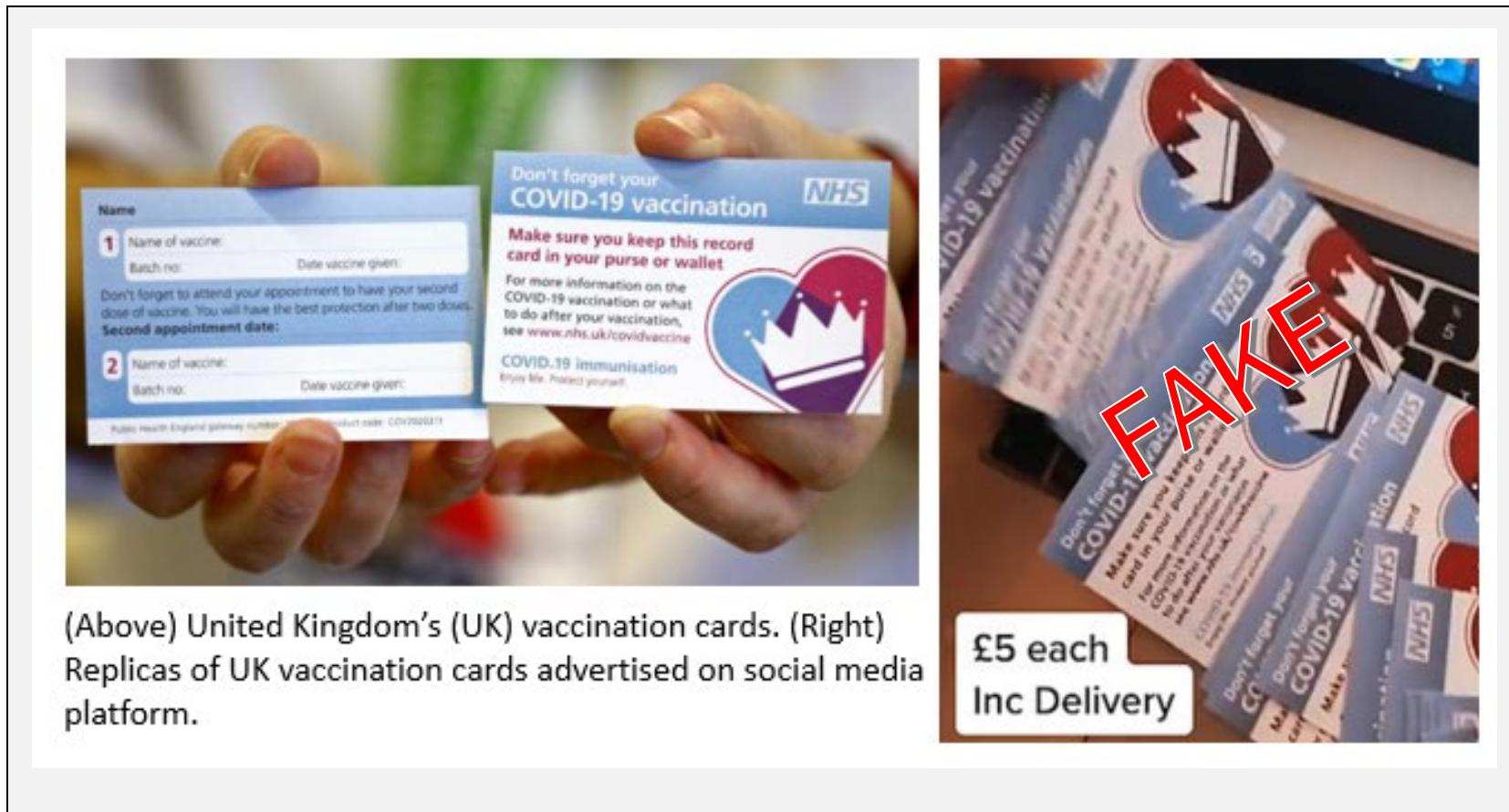
(U) The IHR provides the framework for improved international public health security. Vaccination certificates are critical for national preparedness, reduction and management of public health threats and the prevention of international spread to other countries. Vaccination certificate checkpoints for diseases at border crossings, designated airports, and ground crossings remains an essential element of the regulation.

Yellow Fever IHR Implementation

(U) Currently, yellow fever is the only IHR designated disease for which countries may require proof of vaccination from travelers. Yellow fever virus is found in areas of Africa and South America, estimated for more than 30,000 deaths yearly. The yellow fever Annex was implemented to enhance disease control and prevention regarding international travel.

(U//FOUO) **Outlook:** Vaccinations are crucial to the reduction of international disease spread and central to improving public health measures across borders. Effective implementation of vaccine certificates requires global coordination of relevant data management principles. Shared and trusted global COVID-19 vaccine certificate architecture with digital solutions will likely increase the success of international health policy. Considering the widespread proliferation of near replica capabilities and malicious cyber activity, law enforcement and other officials in the US should stay abreast of developments regarding the certificates and how they would be used if implemented within US policy. Criminal activity will likely expand if the certificates become a requirement for travel or entry into specific events and venues.

(U) Prepared by the Intelligence Division of DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office (CWMD). For questions, please contact: DHSCWMDIntel@hq.dhs.gov.

(U) Figure 1: United Kingdom (UK) COVID-19 Vaccination Card

(U) Note. UK officials confirmed the cards were not meant to serve as “vaccine passports” but rather a method to remind individuals to get their second dose of the vaccine. However, there has been some indications that UK officials were considering the potential for these cards to be used in future government policy.

Scope, Source, Reference, and Dissemination Information

Scope Note	<i>(U//FOUO)</i> This report is intended to inform federal, state, local, tribal and territorial officials that countries may endorse a COVID-19 amendment to the IHR (2005). This product is meant to identify potential vulnerabilities that may exist if COVID-19 vaccination certificates are used and the potential international health impact counterfeit vaccination certificates pose. Additionally, this report establishes a baseline for follow-on analysis related to the effectiveness of international use of COVID-19 vaccination certificates if implemented. This information is current as of 15 January 2021.						
Product Current as of: 15 January 2021							
Source Summary Statement	<i>(U//FOUO)</i> DHS-CWMD has medium countries' endorsement of a COVID-19 amendment to the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) is likely to trigger vaccination certificates becoming a target of counterfeiting by scammers. This is based on the conclusion and recommendation of the study, peer reviewed medical journals and multiple scientific based open-source reports.						
Definitions	<p><i>(U)</i> COVID-19: A highly contagious respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. SARS-CoV-2 is thought to spread from person to person through droplets released when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.</p> <p><i>(U)</i> SARS-CoV-2: The virus that causes a respiratory disease called coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19). SARS-CoV-2 is a member of a large family of viruses called coronaviruses. These viruses can infect people and some animals.</p> <p><i>(U)</i> IHR: The IHR are an instrument of international law that is legally-binding on 196 countries, including the 194 WHO Member States. The IHR grew out of the response to deadly epidemics that once overran Europe. They create rights and obligations for countries, including the requirement to report public health events. The Regulations also outline the criteria to determine whether or not a particular event constitutes a "public health emergency of international concern".</p>						
Probability & Likelihood Language Definitions and Estimated Percentage of Event Occurrence	Almost no chance	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly even chance	Likely	Very likely	Almost certain(ly)
	Remote	Highly improbable	Improbable (improbably)	Roughly even odds	Probable (probably)	Highly probable	Nearly certain
	01-05%	05-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%
Reporting Suspicious Activity	<i>(U)</i> All WMD and health security threats and emergencies should be reported to 911 and your state or local fusion center or FBI WMD Coordinator. If you see something, say something.						
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Customer Contact & Feedback	<i>(U)</i> This report was written by the Strategic Intelligence Branch within the Intelligence Division of DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office (CWMD) Coordinated within the DHS Intelligence Enterprise and externally with FBI. To provide feedback or for more information on this and other Homeland-related CWMD threat issues, please contact: DHSCWMDIntel@hq.dhs.gov.						