

EU insists virus shots will remain voluntary

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A nurse prepares a syringe with Moderna COVID-19 vaccine during the national launch of the vaccination of hospital staff at the Etterbeek-Ixelles site of the Iris Sud Hospitals in Brussels, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. (Stephanie Lecocq, Pool Photo via AP)

The European Union sought Monday to ease concerns that citizens might be obliged to get shots against the coronavirus before they're allowed to

travel, as debate swirls over the use of vaccination certificates to help reopen tourism across the 27-nation bloc.

The European Commission has been weighing a Greek proposal to issue vaccination certificates to help get travelers to their vacation destinations more quickly and avoid another disastrous summer for Europe's tourism sector.

Greece plans to issue digital vaccination certificates to each person inoculated against COVID-19. EU heads of state and government are due to discuss the proposal at a video-summit on Thursday.

European Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic insisted that "vaccination is voluntary." He noted that some people cannot be inoculated for health reasons while others might simply object.

"We are taking all the precautions that we would not create any ground for different treatment of these people, or any kind of limitations of their rights," he told reporters after taking part in videoconference talks between European affairs ministers.

Sefcovic said the priority now must be to gather data about the disease and its treatment on [digital platforms](#) on a Europe-wide scale so that health experts can compare the way the virus mutates, how the vaccines are working and whether testing standards are harmonized across the [27 member countries](#).



Nurses administer Moderna COVID-19 vaccines to health care workers during the national launch of the vaccination of hospital staff at the Etterbeek-Ixelles site of the Iris Sud Hospitals in Brussels, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. (Stephanie Lecocq, Pool Photo via AP)



A nurse administers a Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to doctor Roger Halleman during the national launch of the vaccination of hospital staff at the Etterbeek-Ixelles site of the Iris Sud Hospitals in Brussels, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. (Stephanie Lecocq, Pool Photo via AP)



A nurse prepares syringes with Pfizer/Biontech COVID-19 vaccines during the national launch of the vaccination of hospital staff at the CHR Citadelle hospital in Liege, Belgium, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. Indications that the new variant of COVID-19 first detected in Britain is now starting to gain a foothold in Belgium are increasing Monday with cases reported several schools in the north of the country on top of an outbreak in a care home. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)



A nurse administers a Pfizer/Biontech COVID-19 vaccine to a health care worker during the national launch of the vaccination of hospital staff at the CHR Citadelle hospital in Liege, Belgium, Monday, Jan. 18, 2021. Indications that the new variant of COVID-19 first detected in Britain is now starting to gain a foothold in Belgium are increasing Monday with cases reported several schools in the north of the country on top of an outbreak in a care home. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

"We need to make sure that the data would be collected electronically in respect of all data privacy rules and it should be done on interoperable platforms so we can share the data," he said, adding that it's need to assess the "efficiency of the vaccines, for the evaluation of the whole vaccination process."

Vaccinations have started across the 27-nation EU, but it is unclear what proportion of the population will be vaccinated in time for the summer holiday season.

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