

August, 25, 2021

FAQ for Confirmation of Certificate of testing for COVID-19

1 If some of the personal information, such as passport number, is not included on the certificate, is it invalid?

Even if the certificate does not contain all of the personal information such as name, passport number, nationality, date of birth, sex specified in the predetermined format by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (the MHLW), the certificate can be accepted as valid as long as the passenger's identity can be confirmed by comparing the name and date of birth with the passport. In case that either your name or passport number is not described in a certificate, the certificate will be invalid since the bearer of the certificate cannot be identified.

2 If the doctor's name is not listed, will it be invalid?

Certificates issued by the following countries/regions may be accepted for boarding even if the doctor's name is not listed:

Eswatini, Republic of Seychelles, Chile, Germany, Burkina Faso, Burundi, United States, Republic of South Africa, Lesotho, Jamaica

Moreover, certificates which have no description of a name of a medical institution, a doctor's name and an imprint of a seal might be regarded as valid at the discretion of the quarantine officer, since you may not be able to obtain a certificate that includes these items in some countries.

3 If a valid specimen and test method are not listed, is it invalid?

The certificate will not be valid if it does not contain a valid specimen or test method. For example, if the certificate states "Nasal and throat swab" as the specimen, then it is invalid. For more information on specimens and testing methods that can be accepted as valid certificates, please refer to the Guidance "Requirements for Test Certificates Required for Entry into Japan" (hereinafter referred to as the Guidance).

As required, we will change the specimens and testing methods that are considered valid. In this case, we will update the Guidance and notify you of it on the website of the MHLW. Please check out the latest version of the Guidance.

However, if the certificates which have no description about specimen are issued by the government of Bangladesh or Brunei, they can be accepted as valid because those governments state publicly that only “nasopharyngeal swab” is used as a specimen.

4 Why are "nasopharyngeal swab", "saliva" as well as "nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swab" the only specified specimens for testing?

The specimens required for the certificate at the time of entry into Japan are the same as the specimens recommended for testing asymptomatic persons in Japan. The recommended specimens for testing asymptomatic persons are listed in the Guidelines for Testing for Pathogens of Novel Coronavirus Infections (<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/000747986.pdf>), and currently include "nasopharyngeal swabs" and "saliva".

In addition, "nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal swab" has been added to the list of valid specimens for travelers arriving in Japan after midnight (Japan time) on July 1, 2021, following an approval by the Council of the MHLW on June 25, 2021, as a valid specimen for pre-departure testing of travelers to Japan.

5 How do you handle a certificate that only states the date of specimen collection, but not the time of specimen collection?

Even if only the date of specimen collection is written, the certificate can still be accepted as valid in case it can be clearly confirmed that the scheduled departure time of the flight is within 72 hours of the collection.

6 What happens if a flight is cancelled or delayed significantly on the day of departure, and the passenger has to leave the country after 72 hours?

If the flight after the change is within 96 hours from the date and time of specimen collection, it is not necessary to obtain the certificate again and you may board the aircraft.

On the other hand, if the time of departure after the change is over 96 hours from the date and time of specimen collection, you are required to obtain a new certificate from the perspective of quarantine measures. We appreciate your understanding and cooperation.

7. What happens to the travel history when transiting through the U.S., since it is required by the domestic law in the U.S. to go through immigration procedures, with some exemptions?

If the purpose of your stopover is transition, and as long as you remain stay in the airport, including staying at the hotel located inside the airport, the transition country (the U.S.) will not be included in your travel history. However, in case you go out of the airport, or stay at the hotel located outside of the airport, the transition country (the U.S.) will be included in your travel history.

8. When will be the starting point of counting “72 hours before departure” on the following transition cases?

Case A transiting through a country without immigration procedures

Case B transiting through a country where immigration procedures are required by the domestic law

For the case A, the starting point to count “72 hours before departure” will be the time you leave a country from which the passenger originally departed.

For the case B, if you go out of the airport, or stay at the hotel located outside of the airport upon transition, the starting point to count “72 hours before departure” will be the time you leave a transit country you originally departed. Therefore, if 72 hours have passed since you obtained a certificate at a departure country before you leave the transit country, you need to be tested again to obtain a certificate in the transit country.

However, if you stay in the airport upon transition, the starting point to count “72 hours before departure” will be the time you leave a departure country, which means you are not required to obtain a certificate again at a transition country.

For example, if you travel from Sweden to Japan, transiting through Germany, the starting point to count “72 hours before departure” will be the departure time from the airport of Sweden. If you travel from Brazil to Japan, transiting through Mexico and the U.S.(which requires immigration procedures), the starting point to count “72 hours before departure” will be the departure time from the airport of Brazil, only if you don’t go out of the airport upon transition through the U.S.

9. In some countries, including the U.S., countries/regions designated in response to coronavirus variants of special concern on border measures is designated on a state-by-state basis. When transiting domestically within the U.S. to travel to Japan, will transiting state be included in the travel history? And when will be the starting point of counting “72 hours before departure” in this case?

Upon transition inside the U.S. by air, the transition state will not be included in the travel history as long as you stay in the airport, and the starting point to count “72 hours before departure” will be the time you leave the departure state.

When transiting across several states by land, those states will not be included in the travel history as long as the purpose of the transit is departure to Japan. However, if you stay at the hotel on the way, the state of stay will be included in the travel history. In this case, the starting point to count “72 hours before departure” will be the time of departure of the flight to Japan.

This procedure will be applied not only for those who will depart from areas designated in response to coronavirus variants of special concern on border measures but also for those who will depart from countries as designated above. For example, in case that you fly to Japan from country X, which is designated in response to coronavirus variants of special concern on border measures by a country, departing from an airport A in the country X by a domestic flight and transiting at an airport B in the country, the starting point of counting “72 hours before departure” will be the time of departure at the airport A, as long as you stay in the premise of airport B during the transit.

10 Do children also need to obtain a certificate?

We request that children also obtain a certificate.

However, in consideration of the fact that many countries do not test preschool-aged children as part of their system, children (generally under the age of 6) do not need to have a certificate, as long as they are accompanied by caregivers, including parents who obtain negative testing certificates.

11 Is the prescribed format of the MHLW the only valid form of certificate? Is there any other valid format?

In order to avoid confusion in places such as airport check-in counters, you are kindly requested to use the format prescribed by the MHLW.

When using a format other than the prescribed format due to unavoidable circumstances in each country or region, please kindly note that it may take some time for verification at the time of boarding procedures and landing in Japan.

For travelers who have no choice but to use a format other than the prescribed format due to unavoidable circumstances in a departure country or region, the submission of an optional format is not precluded. Nonetheless, the items to be included in the testing certificate such as valid specimens and test methods must be satisfied. As such,

- Please carefully check the designated criteria of the specimens and test methods to see if they will be regarded as valid.

- Please make sure that the information on the certificate is complete.

- In case you use format other than the prescribed format, please highlight the required information in that format, such as the specimen and the test method, in order to facilitate verification procedures of the test certificate.

12 Will the certificate that does not use the prescribed format be regarded as valid, if the prescribed format which contains the information lacking is attached?

When attaching the prescribed format, which contains the information lacking, to the certificate that does not use the prescribed format, please make sure that the specific number (test number, specimen number, etc.) on the certificate is mentioned in the “Remarks” column of the prescribed format, in order to link the two documents. Please be aware that the attached prescribed format also requires a signature of the doctor who issued the certificate.

13 If a certificate that does not use the prescribed format is not written in English or Japanese, is it invalid?
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If the certificate is written in languages other than English or Japanese, it will be considered invalid, because the Japanese authorities cannot determine the contents of the certificate. However, if an English or Japanese translation of the certificate is attached and the contents of the certificate can be determined, it can be regarded as valid.

Please be aware that penalties may be applied in accordance with the Japanese Quarantine Law if a false translation is attached in order to make it falsely appear as if the certificate were valid.

14 Is an electronically issued testing certificate valid?
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In order to avoid confusion in place such as airport check-in counters, you are kindly requested to present the MHLW's prescribed format in a paper form.

However, in some cases, due to unavoidable circumstances such as the situation in each country/region or the time constraints of the person concerned, it may not be possible to obtain a paper copy of a testing certificate. Thus, it is acceptable to present an electronically issued testing certificate (hereinafter referred to as "electronic testing certificate") when boarding an aircraft or entering Japan.

A testing certificate in an electronic format shall be treated as a valid testing certificate if it can be presented as an attachment to an e-mail or displayed items on mobile terminal using an application, or as a printed document.

Moreover these electronic testing certificates can be treated as valid, only if the items of certificates are visually confirmed and are the same items as on paper testing certificates.

Any format of electronic testing certificate, such as PDF, image, photograph, is acceptable. Nevertheless, testing certificates in a variable media (such as Word, Excel, e-mail text message body) in which the contents can be modified by the applicant are invalid. In addition, if items necessary for confirming the validity of the testing certificate (such as personal information, specimens and test methods) are unclear or blurred, such certificates are also regarded as invalid. Please kindly note that Japanese and foreign nationals entering Japan from areas other than those subject to landing refusal will be required to print out or send them to a designated e-mail address for submission upon entry into Japan, and that foreign nationals entering Japan from areas subject to landing refusal will be required to submit a printed copy at the immigration.