

PRESS RELEASE

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German Ethics Council currently advises against Covid-19 immunity certificates

In view of the many uncertainties that still exist regarding immunity against the novel coronavirus, the German Ethics Council does not recommend the use of immunity certificates at this time. Commercially available tests to detect immunity against SARS-CoV-2 should be more strictly regulated, considering doubts around their reliability and the resulting potential dangers.

The introduction of state-controlled immunity certificates has been controversially discussed for several months. Recently, the Federal Minister of Health has asked the German Ethics Council to discuss the ethical requirements and implications of immunity certificates.

The German Ethics Council unanimously rejects the introduction of such certificates at the present time. In the event that immunity should become verifiable with sufficient reliability in the future, there are different views within the Council on whether and – if so – under what conditions the introduction of immunity certificates should be recommended.

Based on a risk ethics approach, half of the Council members come to the conclusion that if the scientific and medical prerequisites develop favourably, the introduction of immunity certificates would be advisable under certain conditions and in a step-by-step process that could at least initially limit their use to specific contexts or areas. Some members argue that more far-reaching applications would also be justifiable.

Considering practical, ethical and legal reasons, the other half of the Council members reject the use of state-controlled immunity certificates even if uncertainties regarding the knowledge about immunity were resolved in the future.

In addition to these different positions, the Ethics Council advocates in further joint recommendations that the public should be comprehensively informed about anti-infection measures serving the common good and about the limited scope of antibody tests. Furthermore, the Ethics Council recommends targeted and coordinated research on the infectious and immunological properties of the novel coronavirus.

The joint recommendations and the recommendations relating to the different positions as well as the full text of the Opinion are available (in German) at

<https://www.ethikrat.org/fileadmin/Publikationen/Stellungnahmen/deutsch/stellungnahme-immunitaetsbescheinigungen.pdf>.

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