

Expert: Open US southern border, vaccinate everyone on both sides

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The United States-Mexico border should be fully reopened—with people on both sides given easier and expanded access to vaccines in the U.S.—according to a [new brief](#) from Rice's Baker Institute for Public

Policy.

Banning Mexican citizens and residents from crossing the [border](#) while allowing U.S. citizens to pass back and forth freely has not stopped the virus from spreading, writes Tony Payan, director of the Baker Institute's Center for the United States and Mexico, but it has depressed [economic activity](#) on both sides.

"Evidently, both governments sought to balance commercial and [economic concerns](#) with public health anxieties, but the system was never rebalanced to prevent all nonessential travel rather than simply restricting Mexican citizens and residents from using land ports of entry," he writes.

To slow the spread of the COVID-19 delta variant and reignite the region's economy and social activity, Payan argues, Mexicans in the region should be encouraged and enabled to get vaccinated on the U.S. side and carry proof of it back home.

"It is time to allow [health services](#) in U.S. border cities and towns to also care for all borderlanders, regardless of nationality," he wrote. "At the same time, vaccines should be made readily available to health services on the Mexican side of the border, targeting those who do not have a passport or visa and cannot enter the United States."

Payan added: "As the vaccine rollout continues, even if faster on the U.S. side and slower on the Mexican side of the border, there is less of a reason to continue with blanket restrictions on half of all borderlanders—the 7.5 million Mexican citizens and residents out of a border population of 15 million in all U.S. border counties and Mexican border municipalities."

Contactless screening systems similar to those at airports could be used

at [border crossings](#) to slow the spread of COVID-19, Payan argues. And allowing more travelers to register on platforms like Global Entry and Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection, would not only make cross-border traffic more seamless, it would also reduce contact.

"As the next few months are key to understanding the evolution of the pandemic, given new dangerous coronavirus strains such as the delta variant, both governments should work jointly to prepare the border for a new normal, restoring travel to those who can show proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test; expanding vaccination rates throughout the border in the short term; and expanding contactless border technology in the longer term," he wrote. "These measures can only make the border more efficient, prosperous and secure—and especially healthier."

Provided by Rice University

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