

Airlines celebrate US flights take-off

AIRLINE chiefs yesterday welcomed the return of transatlantic flights as a "time for celebration".

By Michael Knowles

They declared it was time to get trade and tourism back on track and allow friends and families to connect once again. The first two flights to the US - British Airways BA001 and Virgin Atlantic VS3 - were due to take off from Heathrow simultaneously for New York at 8.20am today.

It comes as new data reveals one in five people planning to go on holiday abroad next year hope to travel to the US.

Fully vaccinated foreigners from anywhere in the world will be able to visit America and avoid quarantine.

But the vast majority of unprotected tourists are not expected to be allowed in as President Joe Biden has described the US air travel policy as one "that relies primarily on vaccination".

This means those who haven't had both jabs will be reliant on a very limited list of exemptions. Passengers must take a Covid test no more than three days before travel at a cheap and rapid antigen test is acceptable.

Sean Doyle, British Airways chief executive, said: "After more than 600 days of separation, today is our moment to celebrate the UK-US reopening. We're

setting aside rivalry and for the first time ever, British Airways and Virgin Atlantic aircraft will be seen taking-off together to mark the vital importance of the transatlantic corridor.

"Transatlantic connectivity is vital for the UK's economic recovery, which is why we've been calling for the safe reopening of the UK-US travel corridor for such a long time.

"We must now look forward with optimism, get trade and tourism back on track and allow friends and families to connect once again."

The US is the UK's largest trading partner, and aviation contributes £2.5million per day to the British economy. Shai Weiss, Virgin Atlantic chief executive, said: "Today is a time for celebration, not rivalry."

"Together with British Airways we are delighted to mark today's important milestone, which finally allows consumers and businesses to book travel with confidence. The

British Airways boss Sean Doyle



Now you may need three jabs to travel

By Martyn Brown

TRAVELLERS who refuse a booster jab could face a quarantine and test regime under a controversial plan considered by ministers. The scheme, based on the Israeli system, would change the definition of "fully vaccinated" from two vaccinations to three.

It also means travellers cannot avoid a third jab by producing evidence of a negative Covid test. But officials are considering a grace period to let people travel without quarantine if they have sought a booster six months after their second jab and have not yet been offered an appointment.

A Government source said yesterday: "This is not going to happen immediately - but happen it will." But the plans



Extra shot drive... Sajid Javid

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Currently, those not fully vaccinated must self-isolate for 10 days after returning to the UK and pay for expensive PCR tests - one before departure and two back on British soil.

It is highly likely the Scottish Government will also adopt the UK travel ban for those failing to have a booster. First Minister

US has been our heartland for more than 37 years and we are simply not Virgin without the Atlantic."

Visitors from the UK, Ireland and the Schengen common travel area of Europe have been banned from travelling to the US since March 2020.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: "I'm delighted to see flights return in time for Thanksgiving and Christmas."

Travel trade body Abta says 18 per cent of people who plan to holiday abroad hope to travel to the US over the next year.

Yesterday it emerged that airlines are preparing to lay on hundreds of thousands more seats to Greece next summer than they did in 2019.

Vassilis Kikilias, the Greek tourism minister, said the country was expecting 35 per cent more tourists from the UK than in 2021. He forecast

the season would start earlier than usual in March.

Michael O'Leary, chief executive of Ryanair, has said he expects the recovery to hit full swing by next summer, when he will be operating more than 500 new routes across Europe.

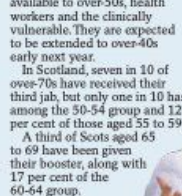
News of the travel curbs came as Health Secretary Sajid Javid encouraged people to urge older relatives to come forward to have booster their vaccinations

Boosters are currently available to over-70s, health workers and the clinically vulnerable. They are expected to be extended to over-40s early next year.

In Scotland, seven in 10 of over-70s have received their booster, but only one in 10 has among the 50-54 group and 12 per cent of those aged 55 to 59.

A third of Scots aged 65 to 69 have been given their booster, along with 17 per cent of the 60-64 group.

Ms Harman is calling for action



Oh wow, my baby!

A YOUNG mum who gave birth while in a coma after contracting Covid finally met her daughter almost a month later. Saskia Lane, 21, is now urging other pregnant women to have the vaccine after initially turning it down. She says the advice she receives was conflicting.

By Cally Brooks

Mum Becky, 41, added: "Saskia was diagnosed with gestational diabetes while pregnant and decided not to have the vaccine initially after worrying about the impact it could have on Betsy."

"I encouraged her to get the vaccine but she had her first jab just a few days before contracting Covid, so it wasn't effective."

Saskia, of Partridge Green, West Sussex, is still in hospital at Guy's receiving treatment for severely damaged lungs. Her family have set up a fundraising appeal as Lee has had to go part-time with his job as a panel beater to look after both Betsy and Eliza, two.

To donate, visit gotfund.me/04081ba



Fears... Saskia was kept in coma for three weeks

Her mum Becky Knight said: "Saskia wants to encourage everyone to get the vaccine following her experience."

Saskia tested positive for coronavirus at the end of August and was admitted to intensive care with breathing difficulties.

She was eight months' pregnant and sent for an emergency C-section. But after the birth of daughter Betsy Mae, now eight weeks old, doctors at St Thomas' Hospital in central London kept the mum of two in an induced coma to help her survive.

Three weeks later Saskia was woken up by medics and finally

lungs. Her family have set up a fundraising appeal as Lee has had to go part-time with his job as a panel beater to look after both Betsy and Eliza, two.

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Together at last... Saskia, Betsy and partner Lee

Unjabbed staff will 'head to the NHS'

By Mark Reynolds

THOUSANDS of unvaccinated nurses and healthcare assistants in care homes are set to pour into the NHS after a ban on unjabbed staff comes into effect this week.

Up to 60,000 care home workers across England - about 10 per cent of the workforce - have still not been double-vaccinated against Covid.

But on Thursday, they will be forced to leave their jobs when a new law banning the unvaccinated or partially vaccinated from working in care homes kicks in.

Bosses say the move will lead to staff simply swapping one workplace where they care for the vulnerable elderly for another - hospitals.

Gaps

That is because the Government has agreed to delay the same "no jabs, no job" rule on NHS workers until spring.

Mike Padgham, of the Independent Care Group, said "a considerable number" were migrating to the NHS. "It's a bizarre policy having two different deadlines."

Dr Charles Armitage, of the National Care Force, which helps fill staff gaps, said: "Staff are going to leave and work in retail and hospitality, or go to the NHS, which is robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Agencies were turning up at care homes offering staff earning up to £11 an hour jobs in the NHS at £7 an hour.

Staff shortages could force homes to close homes to new residents.

Mike Padgham says the policy is 'bizarre'

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MPs' fury huge limit

A POWERFUL human rights committee has demanded to know why families are still at the mercy of "draconian restrictions" on care home visits.

Eighteen months ago the outbreak of Covid saw 400,000 residents locked in and their loved ones locked out. Today, with Christmas approaching, the scandal persists.

Parliament's Human Rights Commission said there is widespread concern that restrictions are still being applied indiscriminately. It now wants answers from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as to why it failed to act on previous recommendations.

It comes after this newspaper laid bare the human misery of visiting bans, with relatives left angry, upset and fearful at the denial of basic rights - despite care homes being ordered to open up. In a stinging letter to Peter Wyman, the head of the care regulator, Harriet, the

fundamental right to a family life has been denied by care providers and the Government has failed to provide adequate guidance to safeguard this right. Relatives are being asked to jump through bizarre hoops just to visit their loved ones. The only requirement for a relative wanting to become an Essential Visitor is the ability to provide well-being support and companionship.

Yet relatives are being asked to provide DBS criminal record checks and undertake "training courses" which are unnecessary and a breach of official guidelines. Those living in care homes tell

Ms Harman is calling for action

as families still face on care home visits

added: "We are concerned the difficulties we have highlighted persist and these recommendations have not been acted upon, which might lead to further infringements of residents' human rights during the winter."

Stringent

She has given the CQC until November 19 to respond.

In September, actress Ruthie Henshall, ambassador for care home campaign group Rights for Residents,

led a march on Downing Street demanding the implementation of Gloria's Law in honour of her mother who died in May aged 87 after being "imprisoned" for most of lockdown.

She and tens of thousands of families want Essential Care Givers given a legal right to unrestricted access regardless of Covid outbreaks, restrictions, lockdowns or variants.

Helen Wildbore, director of the Relatives & Residents Association, said: "People living in care were abandoned at the outset of the pan-



March... Actress Ruthie Henshall with her late mum, Gloria, who died in care

dem and continue to be left behind today, still living under stringent government restrictions."

The Government does not have plans to legislate to enable visiting, Kate Teroni, chief inspector of adult social care at the CQC, said: "We expect providers to follow guidance on visiting where people are entitled to have designated visitors, and where we are made aware that this is not happening we follow up with the provider and inspect if we consider there is risk."

"Where we have evidence that this is not happening we will continue to take action and are grateful to all those who share their concerns."

The CQC's website says its "routine inspections" are still "suspended". How can it monitor how visiting is being supported? We have provided them with a raft of information that shows shocking disregard of the Government's advice, that care homes must make enabling visits the default position.

Existing legislation has failed to protect the most vulnerable. If the Government fails to legislate "Gloria's Law" to protect the rights of residents, thousands more will spend their final months in isolation.

COMMENT JENNY MORRISON & DIANE MAYHEW

Co-founders of Rights for Residents

The families they would rather die than carry on "existing", while their families remain locked out and are tortured by feelings of guilt. They find themselves wishing their loved one would pass away, rather than continue to decline, in a



state of anxiety and distress, while they watch from the sidelines. Many residents are living the last years, months and weeks of their lives - how can this be acceptable? Care operators are being allowed to control familial relationships.

Some couples have not been allowed visits in the resident's own room, denying them privacy. Some have been prevented from having a private conversation for 15 months.

Protecting people's "right to life" has been almost solely focused on the virus and to the exclusion of other risks to life.

Many residents have simply given up the will to live. Some residents are in a constant state of distress, wondering why they have been abandoned by those they love.

Rights for Residents has met with the Care Quality Commission on several occasions and has