

Painkillers low but beer flows

SHOPPERS have been struggling to get hold of paracetamol from many supermarkets as the impact of Omicron continues to be felt in the economy.

But beer and fruit and veg aisles are filled to the brim, according to data from the Office for National Statistics, which also shows the number of people dining in restaurants is back to pre-pandemic levels.

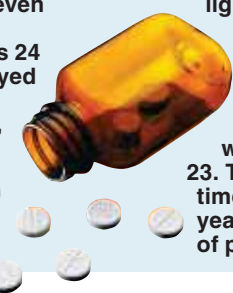
Compared with the same week in 2020, before Covid-19

By August Graham

struck, numbers of seated diners had declined by just three per cent in the seven days to January 24.

ONS data also shows 24 per cent of sites surveyed had either low or no stocks of paracetamol, right, while 17 per cent reported the same for ibuprofen.

Shortages



were also reported for fresh fish, pork, sparkling water, dried pasta and frozen fish.

The data also sheds further light on the aviation industry. There were, on average, 2,400 flights landing and taking off from the UK every day in the week ending January 23. This is around three times as many as last year, but still around half of pre-pandemic levels.

By Sarah O'Grady
Social Affairs Correspondent

CAMPAIGNERS raised fears last night that care homes would still block families paying visits – despite all Covid restrictions being lifted.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid was forced to warn owners and managers to take note of the new guidance – and not to make up their own rules.

His order came after the Government confirmed the end of restrictions on care home visits from next Monday, January 31. Self-isolation periods are also to be cut.

The move follows the success of the Covid booster campaign, with 86.5 per cent of 400,000 vulnerable pensioners now fully vaccinated.

Now those frail elderly people – who faced total isolation from March 2020 and then had to choose which family members were allowed to visit – will be allowed to see all their relatives once more.

However, concerns remain that some homes will “continue to enforce prison-style visiting”.

The Daily Express has highlighted the plight of many thousands of older people deprived of loved ones' support as they battled loneliness and health issues since March 2020.

Jenny Morrison, co-founder of Rights for Residents, said: “We remain fearful for the residents of those care homes who have consistently ignored previous government guidance.

Caution

“Some will no doubt continue to enforce prison-style visiting while facing no penalties whatsoever for denying the right to a family life.”

Caroline Abrahams, of Age UK, agreed and said: “We've seen through the pandemic that some care home operators are a lot keener than others on visiting.

“There's no reason to suppose that this will suddenly be changed by this new guidance. In the end, these decisions are the responsibility of care home owners and managers.”

Mr Javid has advised homes should do “everything they can” to allow “as many visitors as they can” unless there is a confirmed outbreak.

However, Mike Padgham, chairman of the Independent Care Group of care home owners, believes there will not be enough staff to cope with extra visitors come Monday.

A “no jab, no job” policy has already exacerbated a staff shortage across the care sector, he said.

Mr Padgham added: “We would appeal for caution and patience over this change.

“It is being introduced from Monday, which gives care settings precious little time to prepare.

“I expect many homes, like mine, will want to retain an appointment system and of course continue to follow the guidance on negative tests, social distancing, personal protective

equipment and hygiene.” A spokesman for Hallmark, which operates 20 homes across England and Wales, said: “We will need to review the full guidance before making any decisions.”

Prof Martin Green, chief executive of charity Care England, said: “We have some queries that need to be addressed and await the full guidance, as providers have a very

'NO LOGIC TO THE NEW MEASURES'

EXCLUSIVE
By Giles Sheldrick

A DEVASTATED daughter yesterday described how the two-year Covid visiting ban had driven her and her family to breaking point.

Nicky Hurst's mother Imelda, 85, has dementia.

She has been a resident in a north-west care home for three years. But since October it has only been open fully for two weeks.

Nicky said: “Yesterday's announcement is no cause for celebration. What we cannot have is any more rolling lockdowns.

“At my mum's home, members of staff have almost continuously tested positive since October – despite all being fully jabbed. But it is the



Imelda gets a visit from her granddaughter and family

residents who have had to self-isolate.”

The worst aspect for Nicky is her mum doesn't recognise people now. She added: “She hasn't even got familiar staff around her as the care home struggles with retention – like all in the sector.

“When I show her pictures of my brother, she asks, ‘Who is that?’ Without the regular contact she quickly forgets who people are.”

Nicky added: “There is no logic that I can see for these lockdown measures. If a member of staff tests positive, they then go and isolate for five or six days. Yet my mum is locked inside for 14 days. Why?”



Isolated...many residents in care homes have been deprived of contact

Care homes can now open doors to visitors...but how many will?

limited time to enact any changes.” just to see their loved ones when they needed it most during Covid.

Welcoming the changes, Gavin Terry, of the Alzheimer's Society, said: “The easing of care home restrictions will come as a huge relief to thousands of families across the country who have had to jump through too many hoops

Mr Javid has also announced changes to the management of future outbreaks, saying



Warning...Javid

care homes will only have to follow the rules for 14 rather than 28 days.

And essential care givers should continue to be able to visit homes even during outbreaks.

Quarantine will be slashed from 15 days to 10 days after a positive test, and isolation periods for those in care after an emergency hospital visit are also being cut from 14 to 10 days.

rights of those living in care homes have been denied and trampled over.

Despite this announcement, we remain fearful for residents in those care homes that have ignored previous government guidance to relax their access policies.

A further area of concern are the rolling outbreaks in which care homes can be caught in a cycle of 14-day lockdowns. One is enforced

when two or more positive cases are identified. If another is found within that period the home remains closed to visitors for a further two weeks. This can leave people cut off from all but one essential care giver or visitor for months on end.

Some care homes even continue to refuse visits from essential care givers, leaving many residents isolated from their families.

Rights for Residents wants the

isolation to be in line with everyone else. This would end the anomaly that allows care staff to return to work after five days, while care home residents remain subject to a minimum 14 days.

Once again, the rules on isolation are disproportionate and illogical.

Why should residents be denied family contact when care staff are rightly allowed to socialise and return to work after just five days?

Many keep calm ...and carry on wearing masks

THE nation was able to unmask yesterday as Plan B restrictions were lifted – but not everyone was following the new freedom.

Officially, both face coverings and Covid passes were no longer legally required in England.

However, huge numbers of commuters in London were happy to follow the plea from rail chiefs to keep wearing masks.

And among shoppers in Newcastle, retired Carol Grant, 74, said: “It's not nice and I feel like I can't breathe but it's worth it for safety.”

Patrick Tait, a 20-year-old politics student at Newcastle University, said: “It seems reasonable to keep wearing them for others. If someone else is wearing one or they're elderly I'll put one on.

Judgment

“I'm young and healthy, I've had other strains, which are supposedly more dangerous than Omicron, so I do it for others.”

The Prime Minister's spokesman said masks would now be “a matter of personal judgment”.

Alan Thomas, UK boss at Simply Business, said hard-pressed small business owners would “be breathing a sigh of relief”.

But Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Morrisons and John Lewis urged customers to continue wearing them.

And British Retail Consortium boss Helen Dickinson called on shoppers “to be considerate

By Mark Reynolds

to those around them”. In the entertainment world, Julian Bird, boss of UK Theatre and the Society of London Theatre, said he backed masks despite bookings plummeting this year.

He said it was “to protect our hard-working staff, performers and fellow audience members”.

Sajid Javid said “Freedom Day” was possible due to the vaccine rollout and a better understanding of Covid treatments.

The Health Secretary added: “As we learn to live with Covid, we need to be clear-eyed that this virus is not going away, so if you haven't already, please come forward for your first, second or booster jab.”

The UK Health Security Agency also issued a plea for pregnant women to get vaccinated. It follows new data that found getting the jab did not harm babies.

Dr Gayatri Amirthalingam, a UKHSA epidemiologist, said: “There is growing evidence indicating that if you are pregnant, you are at increased risk of serious illness from Covid-19, especially in late pregnancy.”

The agency also said the booster jab cuts the risk of death from Omicron for all.

It said protection was 60 per cent for those 50 and over about six months after a second dose – but soars to 95 per cent after the third jab.

Some 96,871 new Covid infections were recorded yesterday and 338 deaths.



Staying cautious...morning commuters at Waterloo yesterday

HM Government

NHS
Test and Trace

If you have any Covid-19 symptoms, however mild, take a PCR test.

Always stay home if your test is positive, so you don't breathe Covid-19 onto others.

nhs.uk/coronavirus or call 119

STOP COVID-19
HANGING AROUND

NEWS that care home restrictions are to be lifted is a huge step forward in restoring the human rights of those living in them.

Rights for Residents and its supporters have spent 16 months campaigning for this to happen.

However, given how quickly it became apparent Omicron for the fully jabbed was as mild as seasonal flu, moving to restore the rights of those on borrowed time should

COMMENT

JENNY MORRISON
Co-founder, Rights for Residents

have been a much higher priority for the Government.

One of the biggest scandals of the pandemic is the way in which the