

# Fears up to half of care homes still ban visitors

## EXCLUSIVE

By Giles Sheldrick  
Chief Reporter

CARE Minister Gillian Keegan finally admitted yesterday some rogue providers are still denying distraught families from visiting.

Her acknowledgement – the first by a Government minister since the Covid crisis erupted – comes as they were ordered to fully open up today. New guidance states there should be no limit on the number of visitors, that self-isolation periods should be slashed and outbreak management rules obeyed for 14 days, rather than 28.

But there is widespread concern the access scandal will continue due to new outbreaks.

Ms Keegan said: "In some limited cases I am aware guidance is not being followed and not only is visiting not being allowed but essential care givers (ECG) are being denied access – which should only ever happen if the ECG is Covid positive.

"Seeing a loved one is not just nice but essential – as the name suggests. This is a core part of the care which needs to be provided."

The minister praised the Daily Express for fighting on behalf of families, saying:

"This newspaper has campaigned valiantly and led calls for visiting to be a priority. Our statistics suggest in the majority of cases this is happening but I cannot ignore the fact some people are not being able to see their loved ones."

The Express yesterday asked the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to confirm the number of homes that currently have a Covid outbreak and are therefore closed to visitors.

A spokesman said: "We collect this data but it is not published."

But industry insiders say it is as many as 50 per cent. One said: "It would really bring home how many residents remain isolated."

Jenny Morrison and Diane Mayhew, of Rights for Residents, welcomed today's changes but said it would "not help the majority of



Campaign...Ruthie Henshall with her late mum Gloria and sister Susan. Left, at Downing Street



residents that remain forcibly separated due to rolling outbreaks that result in lockdowns, some of which go on for months".

Campaigners have waged a near two-year battle to see loved ones.

They fought for an amendment to the Health and Social Care Act in a grassroots rebellion co-led by actress Ruthie Henshall, 54, who wanted visits made a legal right. She led a

march on Downing Street demanding Gloria's Law in honour of her mum, who died last May aged 87.

The Government refused, saying it had faith in care homes and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to let families in. But the guidance was not legally binding.

Since March every resident could nominate an ECG with unrestricted access. But tens of thousands of families say this has been refused.

The Express used Freedom of Information laws to find out how many ECG requests were made, granted and refused, and how many complaints had been made.

But the CQC said it could not answer the first three as it was not in their remit and providing the number of complaints was too costly.

## COMMENT

GILLIAN  
KEEGAN

Minister for Care



COMPANIONSHIP is vital to those living in care homes – it makes an enormous difference to the lives of those in residential care and their friends and families.

Ruthie Henshall's experience with her mother has been a particularly compelling example of where things haven't gone right. I expect this new guidance to mean in practice that friends and family can be reunited.

Seeing family and friends is vital for people's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

This is why even during the height of the Omicron wave our guidance – in line with scientific advice – was to allow three named visitors in addition to the essential care giver.

I am pleased we are now able to remove the limit on visiting numbers and reduce periods of self-isolation.

Many residents went months without hugging or holding hands with those closest to them – in order to protect their lives.

I want to thank everyone for the precautions they took and to thank staff who continued to work and care for residents in challenging conditions.

I want to work with care providers to remove any obstacles. We are communicating the rules clearly to them to make sure everyone understands the importance of access to essential care givers, as well as updating guidance to ensure people receive the companionship they need while maintaining safety.

Thanks to the continued success of the vaccine rollout, I am delighted we can ease restrictions as we learn to live with Covid.

## Unjabbed medics may not be sacked

By Sarah O'Grady

HOSPITALS could be allowed to employ unvaccinated doctors and nurses beyond the April deadline, it emerged yesterday.

The Care Quality Commission will not take action against hospitals that decide, after a risk assessment, that it is safer to keep such staff in place.

NHS England staff must have a first jab by February 3 to be fully vaccinated by April 1. As of Thursday last week, an estimated 77,591 staff had not had a first vaccine.

It was feared the rule would lead to tens of thousands of nurses, midwives and doctors being sacked.

However, the care watchdog has now



Safety... Prof Baker

said the law against employing unvaccinated staff does not supplant regulations that require NHS trusts to keep patients safe by maintaining adequate staffing levels.

Professor Ted Baker, CQC chief inspector of hospitals in England, said:

"New regulations requiring registered healthcare providers to only deploy fully vaccinated staff in patient-facing roles do not supersede other regulatory requirements.

"Hospital trusts may need to make difficult risk-based decisions."

It comes as 62,399 new Covid cases were reported in the UK yesterday, excluding Scotland. A further 85 people have died, excluding Northern Ireland, a total of 155,698.

WHILE the change in government advice is welcome, it will not help the majority of residents who remain separated from their families due to rolling outbreaks resulting in care home lockdowns.

Nor will it help those vulnerable residents who are unfortunate enough to live in one of the many care homes that continually refuse to follow Department of Health and Social Care guidelines.

We're aware care companies themselves are also writing to DHSC to express their frustration that more sensible outbreak management has not been forthcoming.

Whether a care home has 10 residents or 90, an outbreak still



## COMMENT

JENNY MORRISON  
& DIANE MAYHEW

Rights for Residents founders



constitutes just two positive Covid cases. There's no justification for this disproportionate approach.

Another way to halt these rolling closures is to bring the isolation period for residents in line with the wider population, which is currently five days.

Covid is no longer the biggest

killer of the frail and vulnerable and policies must reflect this reality. The huge risks to the mental health and wellbeing of residents must be balanced against the now minimal risk of them becoming ill from the virus.

It is staggering some residents are still being denied the support

from an essential care giver (ECG) who should have the right to visit during an outbreak.

Care homes refusing ECGs face no consequences and in extreme cases even threaten residents with eviction if their families challenge this decision.

As so many care homes are now embracing visitors it's sinister that these rogue care homes continue to lock families out.

The right to maintain contact in any setting must be given legal force. People are taking their last breath in hospitals, care homes and mental health settings, without the support of their loved ones and this is a scandal that should shame us as a nation.