



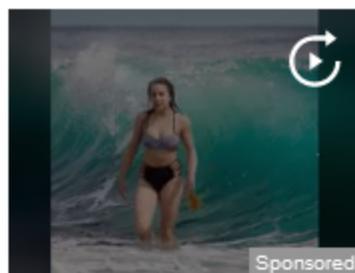
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Care Home operator wants to ban hugs for 10,000 residents and visitors to get job

A MAJOR care home operator has said it wants families vaccinated before they can hug their relatives.

By GILES SHELDRIK

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Despairing families were promised in the Prime Minister's roadmap that one named individual could visit a home and hold hands with a resident by March 8. But Barchester Healthcare, which runs 200 homes looking after 10,000 people, initially said this was "too soon" to open up. Now it wants a "phased and careful approach" and is asking for the named visitor to have had the job.

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Jenny Morrison, of campaigners Rights for Residents, said: "We have been inundated with furious relatives who have received a letter from Barchester.

"They state they are going to allow visits in line with the Government's cautious approach but then totally contradict the advice by saying they feel visitors should be vaccinated.

She added: "After 12 months of keeping our loved ones in isolation companies like Barchester feel they can defy the Government and force relatives to view their loved ones through a screen unless they have had the vaccine.

"Our members have been left distraught at this news."

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Barchester, which last year made a profit of £37.6million, said: "Our current thinking [regarding visiting] is any designated visitor is vaccinated and therefore ensures that, where possible, everyone entering the home or hospital is both protected and helps to protect others."



Families were promised that one named individual could visit a home and hold hands with a resident
(Image: Getty)

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It added: "We take our responsibility for the care of our residents and patients very seriously and believe this is the approach to give them the utmost protection."

Last week Health Secretary Matt Hancock told care homes to open up. But it is feared councils and providers will ignore the new rules.

Ex-minister and care campaigner Baroness Ros Altmann, 64, said: "A care home should care for people, not be a prison in which they are denied the pleasure of family visits."

Kate Terroni, of the Care Quality Commission watchdog, said blanket bans, where there is no active Covid outbreak, are "unacceptable".

She added: "The distress caused by not having important relationships well maintained can be as devastating to mental health as when physical health is not attended to."
