

Covid-19 (Britain): England's 'freedom day' to be day of fear for elderly people, charities warn

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Vulnerable and immunocompromised people anxious about 19 July end to Covid rules.

Boris Johnson's "freedom day" will be a day of fear for elderly and vulnerable people and those with compromised or suppressed immune systems, for whom the efficacy of vaccines is much reduced, charities have warned.

Citing the statement by the new health secretary, Sajid Javid, that Covid infections could surge to a [record 100,000 a day](#) in a few weeks after all social distancing and mask-wearing regulations are removed in England, [Blood Cancer UK](#) has [said that 19 July](#) "will be the day that it feels like freedoms are being taken away from" many people.

"People with blood cancer are unlikely to have got as much protection from the vaccines as people without cancer," the charity said in a tweet. "Lots of you have also told us it's been great to start getting back to normal over the last couple of months."

"The reason many of you have felt able to do this is that the people around you have been keeping their distance and wearing masks. We're appealing to the public to continue to be considerate because there's no way of knowing if the person next to you is immunocompromised."

Jan Shortt, the general secretary of the [National Pensioners' Convention](#), said that the [50 deaths a day being projected](#) by many health experts as a direct result of the ending of restrictions were likely to be among the UK's oldest and most vulnerable.

"The 'free-for-all' depicted in the information from government sources is making older people (and potentially others in society) anxious about going out into crowds and being targeted because they are either wearing a mask or not," she said.

But it is not only older people who are scared and angry. Eve, who is 34 and unable to work because of disabilities, said the relaxation of the rules will "mean I'm rendered housebound by those who choose not to wear masks".

"The so-called freedom day is, for us, the exact opposite," she said. "Shame on those who made this decision and those who choose, going forward, not to wear a mask. You are part of why I will not be able to go outside, just as I was starting to enjoy a bit of actual freedom again - which, for me, has been that I now sometimes go into a shop. That's all I've had. And now it is being taken away. I feel hopeless."

Cathy Bass, a 39-year-old office worker in Lincolnshire, said the younger generation felt they had

been sold out by the government's decision.

"As a younger person who's only recently had a first dose of the vaccine, I feel a bit betrayed by the decision," she said. "We've sacrificed so much during the pandemic mostly for the sake of protecting the older population, yet apparently we can't keep the small step of wearing a mask in certain places for just three more months while we wait for all of the adult population to have had the chance to be fully vaccinated and to be as safe as it's possible to be from coronavirus, including the effects of Long Covid.

"Not to mention keeping unvaccinated under-18s safe - and helping stop the development of new variants," she added.

Ellie from Leigh in Greater Manchester is 38 and lives with her partner, both of whom are classed as clinically extremely vulnerable.

"My partner and I have had our lives on hold for the past 18 months," she said. "We're just at the point where we can start to get out a little more and start mixing with friends and family. The idea that masks will no longer be mandatory terrifies me. I feel that as a disabled and vulnerable woman I'll be excluded more and more from being able to participate in normal life.

"If people will not be wearing masks then I don't want to return to supermarket shopping with my carer, to going out for lunch with my mum or attending events where lots of people will be present," she added.

Jacquie Rogers, a 64-year-old author from Malvern said the relaxation in the rules will "condemn" her to having to avoid all places where others congregate.

The author, who is immunosuppressed and has been shielding since the start of the pandemic, said she "relies on others to protect me".

"[Emerging data from John Hopkins and other research centres](#) suggest the efficacy of the vaccine is very low for people like me compared with others of my age," she said. "I suspect my options outdoors will contract, too, with restrictions lifting, meaning even fewer opportunity for me to socialise or even shop."

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P.S.

• The Guardian. Tue 6 Jul 2021 15.55 BST:
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