



## AS IT IS

# Holiday-COVID Policies Lead to Hard Choices at French Nursing Homes

December 27, 2020

Jean-Francois has not left his **nursing home** in eastern France to visit his daughter or sister since COVID-19 appeared. In fact, the 74-year-old thinks it has been two months since he even stepped outside the building.

His situation is not unusual. Nursing homes in the country have used **lockdowns** to protect their **residents** from the sharp rise in new infections that began in autumn.

But, those measures are suspended for the holiday season through January 3. France took the action to try to ease the mental suffering and sense of aloneness that COVID-19 has caused, especially among older people.

So Jean-Francois can now travel to his daughter's home and stay for a while.

He is not sure such a trip is worth the risk of getting COVID-19. "I'm very scared," he said.

Also, the year-end gift of freedom comes with conditions. Residents who travel will be forced to spend a week alone in their rooms when they return to protect others from possible infection.

Jean-Francois does not like that idea. "A week isn't very long," he said, "but it's extremely long for us." He does not want to hurt his daughter's feelings, but he says he would rather stay home.

Lucile Grillon is the director of Jean-Francois' nursing home. She worries that people will not visit each other safely. She suggests social distancing guidelines will be ignored or forgotten. So, she is trying to limit the holiday visits as much as possible.

“The virus isn’t going to say, ‘It is Christmas.’ I’m not going to **contaminate** people,” Grillon notes.

More than 60,000 people have died of the disease in France. Almost one-third of the deaths were inside nursing homes. The three nursing homes that Grillon leads have successfully avoided infections in the current severe spread of the virus.

Valerie Martin is the director of the Vilanova nursing home, near the city of Lyon. Earlier this year, she and other employees took part in a six-week lockdown at the home to lower the COVID risk they present to residents.

Martin will release six residents on Christmas Day and possibly another four on New Year’s Day. Vilanova was COVID-free until November, when a resident caught the virus during a hospital stay and brought it back to the home. The disease spread to 35 people and caused seven deaths.

Martin says some families have asked her to lock down Vilanova over the holidays to help stop the spread. But, she says that it is not possible.

“There are people who are in fine health, who aren’t COVID-positive, and I am not going to **deprive** them of their families,” she said, adding, “I’m always on the side of freedom for the residents.”

I'm Armen Kassabian.

*The Associated Press reported this story. Armen Kassabian adapted it for VOA Learning English. Katy Weaver was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**lockdown** *-n.* a state of isolation and restricted access when people must stay home

**nursing home** *-n.* a place where people who are old or who are unable to take care of themselves can live and be taken care of

**resident** -*n.* someone who lives in a particular place

**contaminate** -*v.* to make (something) dangerous, dirty, or impure by adding something harmful to it

**deprive** -*v.* to take something away from someone or something

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