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UK is to recognise foreign vaccine certificates but only for its residents

THE UK's decision that travellers returning from France to the UK must quarantine for 10 days on arrival while ending the rule for other countries on its amber list is "totally absurd," says Olivier Cadic, a senator representing French citizens living outside France.

It comes as the UK has said it will start recognising foreign vaccination certificates but only for residents vaccinated abroad.

"It is as if the British government is doing everything it can to make life impossible for those who live between the UK and the continent," said Mr Cadic, who lives in Kent.

"This country, reputed to be the most open to the world, seems to be closing in on itself. I don't recognise it any more."

The UK dropped the need for fully-NHS-vaccinated returning travellers who enter from its amber-listed countries to quarantine on arrival on July 19, except for France, which was placed on an 'amber plus' list.

The UK said it was due to the spread of the Covid Beta variant, first identified in South Africa.

However, it came as a surprise for France, where the Beta variant has not been mentioned as an issue for metropolitan France in any of the health authorities' recent Covid evaluations.

The French government has



An artist's impression of one of the new hybrid ships

called the decision "political" and not scientific.

There were then hopes that if France was placed back on the ordinary amber list, double-jabbed Britons in France could visit quarantine-free after a UK minister said Britons will be able to register foreign vaccinations with GPs for NHS recognition. However, the UK health ministry said this only related to UK residents.

Many *Connexion* readers have written to say the UK quarantine rules had caused suffering. Double-jabbed UK residents can visit France with no Covid test and no quarantine - but everyone travelling France to UK must self-isolate.

"My husband's dad is dying in a care home and we can't get back to see him," one reader

said. "He can't understand why we have not been to see him in over a year. It's time they stopped playing with people's lives for their own political gains."

Rachel Lowe, 53, manager of a website selling vinyl records,



Rachel Lowe (right) with her friend Laura at a previous party

was due to be at her best friend Laura's 50th birthday party this month but has had to cancel.

"I am gutted," she said. "We have always celebrated each other's milestones together. I

Two new ferries ordered for Brittany Ferries

BRITTANY Ferries has signed charter contracts for two new hybrid ferries. They signed with Swedish shipping company Stena RoRo, which will own the ferries and lease them to Brittany Ferries. Construction will now start at a shipyard in China.

The ships are to replace the 'Normandie' on the Portsmouth-Caen route and the 'Bretagne' on Portsmouth-Saint-Malo and will enter service in 2024-2025. They will run on gas, battery power or a combination of the two and will be built with more cabins and longer and higher garages to accommodate larger vehicles.

Battery power will be used mainly when arriving in and departing from ports. Meanwhile, Irish Ferries enters its second month of Dover-Calais crossings. Its site is taking bookings for five crossings a day and a test booking from August 1 to 8 showed prices lower than its rivals, starting from £84 Dover to Calais and £78 Calais to Dover at economy rate, or £124 and £108 flexi rate.

can't afford to be away from France for that long [to go in advance to make the party after quarantine]. I was just planning to go for a long weekend. The quarantine just seems totally nonsensical."

Sally Onn said her family will miss her grandmother's 90th birthday.

"It is out of the question to travel while France is 'amber plus'. There is no way we could self-isolate with three energetic kids aged three, six and eight and the cost of all the tests is prohibitive."

The UK is set to review its travel rules again on August 5.

The UK's environment minister, George Eustice, told radio station *LBC* on July 23 the amber plus listing was because of "the

fact that the vaccine might be slightly less effective against the Beta variant". He added: "As those rates come down, obviously the evidence will change and it can be reviewed and we'll want to be putting countries like France back onto the amber list in the normal way."

The latest Santé publique France figures put the Beta and Gamma (Brazilian) variants combined at 5.1% of cases. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control data shows Beta to be more prevalent in Spain and Greece.

The UK is on France's amber list but was recently subject to an extra entry rule, with five EU countries. Those who are not fully vaccinated must show a Covid test dating from 24 hours before departure.

Checklist: isolation and other new rules

SEVERAL Covid rules have been updated in addition to the extension of the health pass.

They include allowing people who are vaccinated to bypass isolation if flagged as a contact case. Here are the key points:

■ People who test positive are now obliged to quarantine at home for 10 days - previously, this was only recommended.

The Assurance Maladie and will make checks and alert prefects of suspicious cases. Those breaking the rule face a fine of up to €1,500. People who are self-isolating can only leave their homes between 10:00 and 12:00 and in emergencies.

■ People who are fully vaccinated and are flagged as having been in contact with someone who tests positive for Covid no longer face an obligatory self-isolation period. They must take a test after they have been alerted and, if negative, there is no need to quarantine.

If it is positive, they will be obliged to quarantine for 10 days, as in the point above.

■ People who are fully vaccinated with one of the vaccines

approved by France - now including Covishield - can travel to France from anywhere in the world without an essential reason or a Covid test.

This includes people in red or amber countries, such as India, South Africa and Brazil, who can now enter France with only proof of vaccination and a completed sworn statement that they have no Covid-related symptoms and have not been in contact with confirmed cases in the preceding fortnight.

■ Obligatory mask-wearing has been removed in public places where people must use a health pass to enter.

However, local prefects, as well as managers on specific sites, will have the right to enforce their own rules on this if they think it necessary.

The new rules will also only apply to visitors - staff who work in these places will continue to have to wear masks.

■ There will be no punishment for people who fail to scan a QR code at restaurants after MPs voted against a proposal for sanctions of up to a year in prison and a €15,000 fine.

Helping Covid patients to smell the world again

by Suzanna Chambers

ONE YEAR ago, Dr Clair Vandersteen might have treated around 10 patients a year for anosmia, the inability to smell.

Now, the ear, nose and throat specialist routinely sees up to 15 patients a week at his clinic at the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Nice.

The reason: Covid-19.

Loss of smell is a symptom in eight out of 10 cases and can sometimes linger.

"We have seen a very large increase in patients since this time a year ago," Dr Vandersteen said.

"In the last studies of Covid patients one year on, it was revealed that 20% of people who lost their sense of smell still had not regained it."

"The patients we see suffering from a loss of smell are relatively young. It is predominantly a problem that affects people in their 30s and 40s."

While for some people it might seem little more than an inconvenience, Dr Vandersteen warns the condition can make patients anxious and depressed.

"The loss of smell can lead to psychological problems - 30% of people who have lost their sense of smell due to Covid are suffering from some kind of psychological damage. We

love eating, especially here in France, so when chocolate tastes like cigarettes, for example, it can lead to people feeling unhappy or anxious."

"If you can't enjoy the smell of your newborn baby, or the smell of your home, it can be unsettling. It can also be dangerous - if you can't smell gas or smoke, for example."

It is for these reasons his team in Nice have come up with a three-pronged plan to help patients rediscover their sense of smell.

Dr Vandersteen works with a speech pathologist and a psychologist in an innovative health pilot scheme.

A multidisciplinary approach is crucial, he says, as Covid-19 is understood to affect the central nervous system, disrupting the perception of odours.

It is therefore important not only to be able to smell the odours, but also to be able to identify them again.

The first consultation is with Dr Vandersteen, who will assess the level of impairment to the sense of smell.

He does this by examining the nose, as well as by asking patients to identify certain smells when blindfolded.

If necessary, the patient is set 'smelling homework' every day



Dr Clair Vandersteen offers hope to Covid sufferers

for up to six months.

Dr Vandersteen recommends patients choose two or three scented things at random from a list of 30, such as lavender or perfume, and smell them for two to three minutes twice a day.

"If you smell something, great."

"If not, no problem. Try again, concentrating hard on picturing the lavender, a beautiful purple bloom. You have to persevere."

"Sometimes, it's destabilising. You smell something but it's not like usual. Between the olfactory bulb and the brain area, there is a big question mark."

What is missing is the connection. But the memory of olfaction [the sensation of smell] remains anchored. Stimulation helps you."

Dr Vandersteen's colleague Auriane Gros, a doctor of neuroscience and a speech pathologist, then works at re-educating the brain to recover the perception of smells.

"She is basically teaching the brain to rediscover smells that have been lost due to the Covid-19 virus."

"She is in charge of a re-education pilot in which we are trying to rediscover the path to healthy odours."

"We are teaching the neurons to stimulate the right pathways," Dr Vandersteen explains, adding that this process can take another six months.

The final step is therapy with child psychiatrist Louise-Emilie Dumas, who runs group workshops around odours.

Olfactory therapy sessions are not new, having been used to help people with eating disorders - smelling odours allows patients to access memories and create links.

"The team has had positive results," Dr Vandersteen says.

He is inviting anyone suffering from anosmia to get in touch for an examination.