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'A dream come true' as visitors return to Spanish nursing home

Elena Rodríguez, Susana Vera
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NAVALCARNERO, Spain (Reuters) - The sounds of tears and laughter rang through the Casaverde nursing home in Navalcarnero outside Madrid on Monday, as residents received their first visitors since the facility was locked down in March.



Josefa Martinez touches her husband Martin Camacho's hand as she leaves after visiting him on the first day family visits are resumed after three months amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak at the nursing home Centro Casaverde in Navalcarnero, outside Madrid, Spain June 8, 2020. REUTERS/Susana Vera

Facing each other from opposite ends of two large tables pushed together to ensure adequate distancing, Pepa Plaza and her mother Josefa Vila enjoyed an emotional reunion.

"I knew she was OK from the video chats, but now I've seen her," said Plaza from behind a mask. "The only thing missing is I can't go over and give her a kiss." Her mother smiled as a nurse showed a video of her grandchildren back home in the kitchen.

"It's like a dream come true," said Vila. "Because of course you're far away you can't see them. You worry could they have fallen, could something have happened to them?"

Before being allowed inside, visitors must sign a declaration saying they do not have coronavirus symptoms and have not come into contact with anybody who has. Staff members then take their temperature and disinfect their hands and shoes. Once inside, visitors must remain two metres away from their elderly relatives. An exception to the grim norm, the Casaverde home has been only mildly affected by the coronavirus, which has rampaged through elderly communities across the country. There are no official estimates of the national death toll from COVID-19 in Spanish nursing homes, but Madrid authorities reported that some 6,000 retirement home residents have died with coronavirus symptoms since the outbreak began, about 11% of the pre-pandemic population.

Fighting back tears, Maricarmen Cortisejo was thrilled to see her mother doing so well after such an ordeal.

"I can't even talk. She's fine, I can see she's looking great."

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