

Problems for older people in nursing homes during Covid-19



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

About us

We are called Human Rights Watch.



We work to make sure that everyone in the world is treated fairly and gets their rights.

About this report

This report is about older people in nursing homes in the United States.

Nursing homes are homes where groups of older people live together and get care.



This report is about bad things that might have happened to older people during Covid-19.

Covid-19 is an illness that many people in the world are getting.



From October 2020 to March 2021 we got information from many people.

This includes:

- Older people in nursing homes and their families
- Nursing home staff
- People who visit nursing homes to check they are safe
- People who know a lot about care for older people



We also looked at other reports and information.

What we found out

People told us about some big problems in nursing homes during Covid-19.



Not enough staff



Many nursing homes had less staff during Covid-19 than before.

This meant that staff sometimes had to care for more people than they could.

Some older people might have been given bad care because of this.

Families often help nursing home staff when they come to visit.



For example, families might help to feed older people or keep them clean.

But it has been harder for families to visit during Covid-19.



Deaths in nursing homes

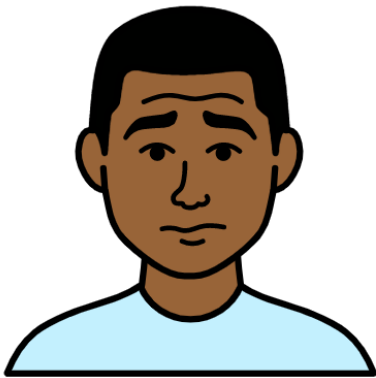
Since March 2020 many older people and staff in nursing homes have died of Covid-19.



Many older people in nursing homes died of other things in the first 6 months of Covid-19 alone.

Information shows that many more people died than usual.

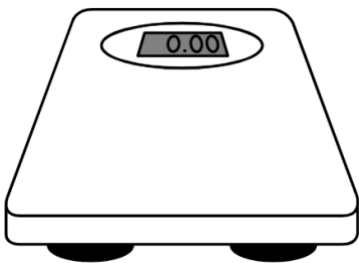
It is not clear why yet. But it should be looked into.



Health problems in nursing homes during Covid-19

Many people said they were worried about health problems in nursing homes during Covid-19.

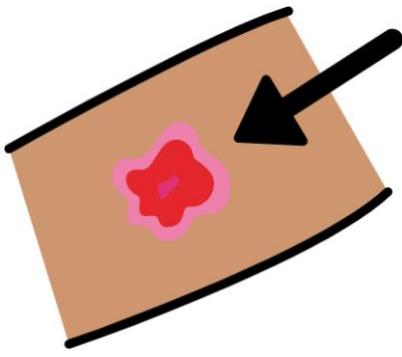
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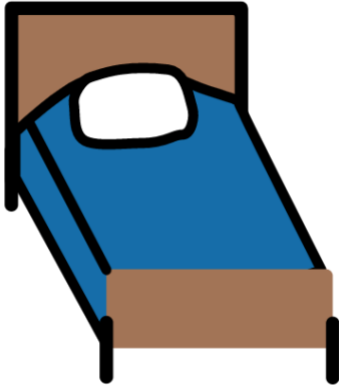
Some older people losing a lot of weight for no good reason.



Some older people not having enough water in their bodies.



Some older people having sore skin that they did not get medicine for.



The sore skin can happen when someone stays in the same place for too long. Like a bed or a wheelchair.

That should not happen.

The sore skin can cause serious problems without the right medical care.



Some older people not being as clean as they should be.

For example, some older people having dirty hair or clothes.



We heard that many older people were very sad or worried because they could not see friends or family.

Many older people had to spend a lot of time alone.

This might have caused big mental health problems for many older people.



We heard that some older people were finding it harder to do things they did before Covid-19.

For example:

- Remember things
- Stand up
- Talk

There have been other problems for many nursing home staff as well.

For example:



Many staff are not paid very much.

They might have to work in more than one nursing home to get enough money.

This might help Covid-19 to spread.



Many staff do not get paid when they are sick.

This means they might still need to work if they are sick.



There have been some problems with staff not having enough face masks or gloves to keep them safe from Covid-19.

Giving older people medicine to control their behavior



Some older people in nursing homes are given medicine to control their behavior and make them quiet.



This might happen more if there are not enough staff to support people.

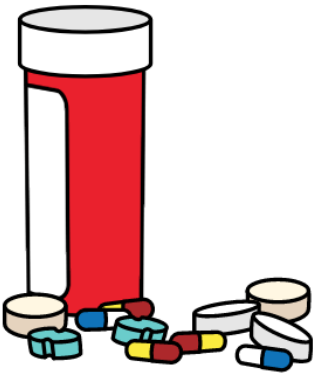
The medicine can be dangerous if it is used to control people's behavior.



In 2018 we wrote a report about problems with the medicine.

It is on our website at:

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/accessible_document/they_want_docile_etr.pdf



The medicine might have been used more to control people's behavior during Covid-19.



The medicine might have caused health problems for some older people.

For example, making them sleep too much or lose weight.



Problems visiting nursing homes

It has been harder for families to visit nursing homes during Covid-19 to see if older people are OK.



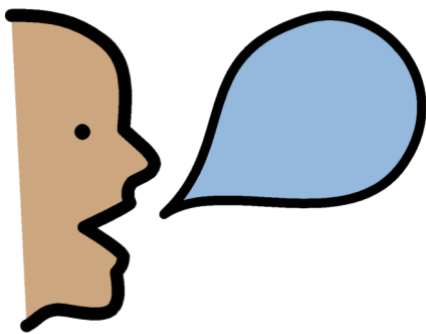
It has been harder for organizations to check nursing homes to make sure they are safe.



At one time most visits had to stop.

This means it is harder to know what has happened to older people during Covid-19.

Not enough care



We heard that there have been many complaints about nursing home care during Covid-19.



But it is hard for many people to go to court about bad care if they want to.

This is because of changes to the law that make it hard for people to go to court.

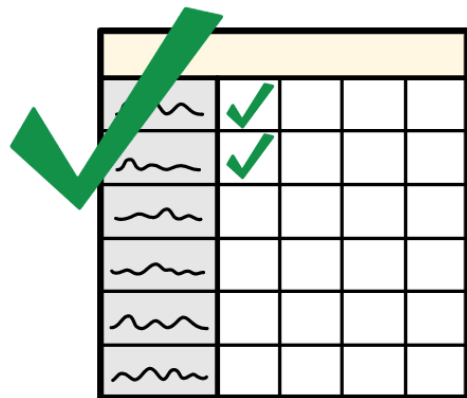
What should happen



Human rights laws in the world say that older people have the right to health and to be treated fairly.

Older people should get help if people try to stop them getting their rights.

The law in the United States says that older people should not be hurt or treated badly.



What we want to happen next

The things below are for the United States governments and other organizations to do.



Start proper checks of nursing homes again straight away.



There should be more checks.

They should look at how older people are treated.

Take action against nursing homes that are breaking the rules.



Make sure nursing homes share information with the public about people's care.

The information should be easy to get and understand.



Make a new law that says nursing homes should have enough staff to take care of people.



Help more nursing home staff to stay in their jobs.

For example, by paying them a fair wage and making sure they are paid if they are sick.



Make sure that older people and their families can get help from courts if there is a problem with their care.



Look into problems that might have happened to older people in nursing homes during Covid-19.

For example:

- Problems with bad care
- Using medicine in the wrong way
- Health and mental health problems