

abcd Guidance on Risk Assessment – document 1

Getting your choir back – practical considerations

The latest issue of this guidance follows on from previous versions which were produced to support choir leaders following the performing arts guidance issued by the DCMS in England between August 2020 and May 2021.

This guidance has now been superseded by broader [guidance for everyone involved settings related to events](#). All restrictions on choirs have been lifted, alongside the opening up of the rest of society. Everyone is delighted to see that the over-restrictive and unfair restriction to 6 singers indoors has been removed, however many people are still anxious about the practicalities of returning to full rehearsals and performance. This guidance aims to give some constructive pointers for people to consider and to help everyone get back to singing safely. We have left in many of the previous pointers for people to consider; some choirs will feel they are no longer appropriate for them, others may still find them useful considerations as they plan.

Separate Government guidelines are in place for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The theory of much of our guidance is applicable to all of them, but you should ensure you read the relevant guidelines for your nation in detail when you make your own risk assessment. Links to guidance for all four nations can be found [on our website](#).

This guidance concentrates on the basic act of getting back to singing in rehearsal; many of the points could also be used for informal workshop situations.

About our guidance

Prepared by *abcd* to help, advise and guide members and all those returning to live singing. This advice is for general guidance and *abcd* can accept no liability for the consequences of your decision to return to singing, including any illness or other adverse impact. We strongly recommend that you and your choir ensure you have adequate insurance.

This is one of three documents published by *abcd* to assist conductors and their choirs in their planning and risk assessments for returning to singing in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are published on our website and all three should be read in conjunction with each other:

1. Guidance on Risk Assessment
2. Risk Assessment templates
3. Practical considerations for choirs and conductors

There are additional resources on our website and members also have access to recordings of recent webinars on risk management which are highly recommended.

These practical considerations for choirs and their conductors are being continually revised and updated as guidance and government regulations change and we hope that they provide a path forward for everyone making plans to resume activity.

Not all choir members may feel it is appropriate for them to return to the choir yet, but by making a detailed assessment and planning carefully, you can give your singers the confidence to make an informed decision.

This advice is for general guidance only, is not definitive and does not represent any endorsement from *abcd* to return to singing. There are no right answers: every conductor and choir member must make their own decision, based on reading current guidelines, a detailed risk assessment and their own situation, as to whether it is appropriate for them to return to singing.

Who is the guidance for?

These notes are mainly intended for those involved in community-based adult choirs, though many points will be relevant for all choirs. We recommend guidance for those involved in **teaching** by:

[Music Mark](#)

[Musicians Union](#)

[Incorporated Society of Musicians](#).

Church choirs can find further useful guidance on the [RSCM's website](#) which is regularly updated and connects to the latest Church of England guidance.

Making Music have published many articles on risk assessment and forward planning [on their website](#), much of which is publicly available.

The **ISM** (Incorporated Society of Musicians) has many detailed articles on risk assessment and guidance for musicians of all kinds [on its website](#), much of which is publicly available.

[Keep checking the latest Government guidance](#)

Check the latest guidance regularly. Use government guidance, not press reports, social media or other interpretations as your main source. Depending on the type of choir you conduct and where you meet, you may need to look at several sets of guidance to get a full picture to inform your risk assessment and planning. See our website for more links and to check on any recent updates.

You can find links to the latest guidance for all four nations on the government guidance page of our website.

[Guidance for choirs in England](#)

The new guidance no longer makes reference to non-professional performance or activities.

The DCMS has confirmed that:

There will be no limits on the number of people, including choirs and any other amateur performance groups, that can gather to rehearse indoors or outdoors.

The need to socially distance has been removed.

The [Events and Attractions guidance](#) applies to workplaces, and is intended for those who are undertaking activities as part of their work, or who organise events in those venues. If an activity is organised in a place of work, even if you are an amateur group and not employed there, then this guidance applies, regardless of whether the people taking part are being paid or not. Organisers will need to assess whether this guidance is relevant when they plan activities. Outside of workplaces, the DCMS advises that amateur performance groups should apply their own judgement, as they will in other aspects of their daily lives, about how to keep safe while the pandemic is still with us. Guidance for individuals on keeping themselves safe can be found [here](#).

All these means that at the current time, choirs will still need to put some measures in place to ensure they are providing a safe environment.

[Priority Actions](#)

The new guidance lists seven priority actions:

- Complete a health and safety risk assessment that includes risks from COVID-19
- Turn people with COVID-19 symptoms away
- Provide adequate ventilation
- Clean more often
- Enable people to check in at your venue
- Communicate and train

These are covered in more detail later in our guidance.

Getting your choir back – practical considerations

Responsibility and risk assessment

Key points:

Read guidelines in detail, in particular any ‘priority actions’

Take notice of any updates

- If you have a committee, they are responsible for the organisation; returning to singing and how you do this is for everyone to agree.
- If you are running a choir as your own business, you are personally responsible, but getting your singers on side is still essential.

A risk assessment is essential

Risk is always present and can't be eliminated entirely. What we can do is try to:

- Identify the risks
- Identify how to minimise them and decide whether the remaining risk is acceptable
- Identify and implement risk control measures
- Let everyone involved know the plan

Read our [‘guidance on risk assessment’](#) document.

Also see risk assessment guidance from [Making Music](#) and the [ISM](#).

There is also risk assessment guidance in the [government guidance](#).

You should do a risk assessment for each venue and activity. The pointers below are intended to help choirs specifically consider how the various risk factors might be addressed and the risk reduced.

Communicate with your choir

Your members’ views will help you plan appropriately

How your members feel about returning is key to how you plan your rehearsals and decide what measures are needed. Are they happy to return to full rehearsals indoors? The requirement to socially distance has been removed: how near to each other are people happy to be? Do people think a personal health declaration should be made each week? COVID-19 is a divisive issue and you're unlikely to get a 100% consensus, but asking the questions now should help get a good sense of how people feel. Keep them in touch with your plans and ask for feedback regularly.

Infection rates

These can vary widely across the country and should be a key consideration for your risk assessment. There may be times when although activity is generally allowed, it isn't appropriate in your particular area. You can find regularly updated regional information on current infection rates at <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>

Download our WellRehearsed app and help us gather vital data

[WellRehearsed](#) is a joint initiative between *abcd* and Making Music. This free app has been developed in volunteer time as a quick and simple-to-use risk management tool for amateur music groups of all kinds. It will help us gather valuable data to make the case for safe singing, both now and in the future - if you are rehearsing your choir, please download and use it!

WellRehearsed is available for Android users in the [Google Play Store](#) and iOS users in the [Apple Store](#). Find out more [here](#).

Your rehearsal venue

Key points:

Good ventilation is vital

Your venue should be operating in accordance with current COVID-19 guidance

Take account of available space and use it to the full

There is useful practical information about the opening of village halls and community venues on ACRE's website ([Action with Communities in Rural England](#)). You might find this useful if you are talking with venue managers about your rehearsal plans. Their detailed information sheet on 'opening village and community halls' covers all the various reopening steps.

Consider:

- What venues are available. Your usual venue may not be suitable for your purposes at present.
- Talk to your venue about its current procedures and its risk assessment. What are the cleaning regimes? Will you need to do any cleaning before and/or after your rehearsal?
- The size of the space. Whilst the requirement to maintain 1 metre plus between people has gone, you should still consider the spacing between singers whilst infection rates are still high. Weigh up how many people it's appropriate to have present, not just how many singers plus conductor can fit in the available space. The type of venue you are in has a big impact here too – 20 singers might 'fit' into a small hall with low ceiling, but that is a very different proposition to 20 singers in, say, a large church. Talk to your members about what they feel comfortable with. See further detail on this under 'group size and layout'.
- Ventilation. This is a vital measure to reduce the risk of aerosol transmission. Again, the size of the space is important, also increasing the volume of air as much as possible to deliver a safe environment for everyone. Are there plenty of windows and doors that can be opened? Or is there mechanical ventilation available? You should consider shorter rehearsal times with breaks for ventilation in your risk assessment.
- CO2 monitors. These can help identify whether a space is poorly ventilated (note they do not directly measure possible exposure to COVID-19). There is further information in the [government guidelines](#) on this and also on the [HSE website](#). A consistent CO2 value of less than 800ppm is likely to indicate that a space is well ventilated and keeping below this level is recommended by HSE for activities such as singing. Portable CO2 monitors are readily available to buy if your venue doesn't have one. Not surprisingly, the prices range vastly, from around £20 to several hundred, so consider what you need before forking out and read the official information to see what might be appropriate for your use. The cheapest is unlikely to be of much use, but the most expensive are probably more than you need.
- Surfaces. Remove surfaces that can be contaminated as much as possible – this also means you and your committee don't have to do more cleaning than necessary.

Who attends rehearsals – reducing the risk

Consider:

- anyone who has been in contact with someone with symptoms of COVID-19 in the previous 5-6 days
- anyone who has been told to self-isolate
- anyone who has symptoms
- anyone with a temperature above 37.5C
- those in high risk groups

Each individual will need to take a decision about returning, according to their own situation. Communicate clearly with your singers what your plans are, including sharing your risk assessment, and encourage them to give feedback, so that everyone comfortable.

Whilst infection rates are still high, many choirs are continuing to ask members to complete a short 'self-assessment' form in advance of each rehearsal, confirming that they are symptom-free and have not been asked to self-isolate. You can do simple forms quickly and easily using Microsoft forms or Google forms or similar and members will soon get into the habit of completing them.

Vaccinations

With the rapid rollout of the vaccines in the UK, most singers will soon have had both their jabs. The subject of vaccine passports is still the subject of much debate and **abcd**'s Facebook group has had plenty of discussion about what it is reasonable to ask members to declare.

Whether a choir decides to require people to take a lateral flow test before each rehearsal and/or declare whether they have been vaccinated is for each individual group, but this can be a very sensitive area and may end up excluding members. Organisations can consider asking individuals to show their NHS COVID Pass. Some choirs have opted for asking their members to tick a box to declare that they have either been vaccinated or taken a test, without stating which; others are doing this anonymously, which gives a useful general percentage figure.

Note that whilst vaccination and testing have a big impact on reducing the risks, however they cannot completely get rid of them, so for now other mitigations still need to be in place.

Test and Trace

- You are no longer legally required to collect contact details, but the government encourages organisers to do so. You can enable people to check in (or your venue may do so on your behalf) by providing an NHS QR code poster, so that choir members scan the QR code when they arrive, using the NHS COVID-19 app. If you do this, you should also have a system to collect and securely store names and contact details for those who want to check in but do not have the app. You may well keep a register of attendees each week anyway. Check with your venue about the keeping of information.
- Seating plan. We still recommend that you send out a seating/standing plan ahead so that people know in advance where to sit and so that you have an accurate record, should you need it in the unfortunate event of an infection.

Group size and layout

Key points:

Consider the space available and make full use of it

Talk to your choir about what everyone feels comfortable with

Consider limiting the number of singers if space is an issue

- Talk to your members about what they feel comfortable with and what you all think is practical. No one enjoys singing 2 metres apart, but at the same time, people may not be ready to sing cheek by jowl every week. There are some acoustical benefits to keeping some space between singers anyway – we've all become more adaptable to different configurations, so now might be the time to reconsider the formation you've used for the last decade – you might be able to improve on it!
- Side-to-side positioning of singers is recommended rather than face-to-face; a checker-board configuration is the best and safest use of space, remembering to leave a reasonable amount of space between rows – the latter is more important than the distance side-to-side.
- If your available space is limited, consider rehearsing in smaller groups. The latest scientific research also states that volume has a big impact on the amount of aerosols generated: reducing the number of participants can help mitigate this.
- How can this be managed practically and musically? Could you use a pre-recorded backing track to fill in the gaps? Some singers will probably be more self-sufficient than others, so mixing some strong singers with those who need more support is preferable.
- If only part of the choir is rehearsing at any one time, consider how you can avoid making others (and those who feel they can't attend yet) excluded. Regular rehearsal notes for all, possibly recording your rehearsals could all help. See our webinar and practical hints for streaming rehearsals.

Within the rehearsal

Key points:

Limit the duration of activity

Avoid raised voices – reduce the volume of singing and speaking

- Consider producing a protocol document to accompany your risk assessment – what needs to happen when, who is responsible for a task each week etc.
- Give your singers as many details as possible and be clear what's expected of them. The more information they have, the less stressful the rehearsal will be for everyone and you can concentrate on singing! It can also help the more nervous members feel at ease about returning.
- Singing positions. Assuming you have sent your seating plan out in advance, make sure the seating is clearly marked. Either mark the floor up so that everyone has their own space, put out names on seats or give everyone a number and a matching seating plan.
- Conductor's position. As you will be facing the singers, make sure that you position yourself far enough away to feel comfortable. Consider the use of amplification in a large venue.
- Length of rehearsal. Scientific data notes the cumulative effect of aerosol transmissions, so consider the duration of your rehearsal and make sure you can ventilate the room frequently. Singers don't necessarily need to leave the room.
- Volume of singing. Whilst the recent scientific data noted that singing does not produce very substantially more aerosol than speaking at a similar volume, there was a steep rise in aerosol mass with increases in the loudness of both singing and speaking. Consider the type of music you sing and using amplification for the conductor.
- Consider the 'pinch points' where overcrowding might take place: entrances and exits, toilets, collecting music, refreshments etc.
- Break times. This can be the most difficult time to control. If the weather is good, consider getting people outside. Encouraging people to bring their own water or refreshments rather than serving drinks etc. cuts down on too much mingling and sharing of surfaces.
- Music and repertoire. Each singer should have their own music and preferably not share it. If you are handing out multiple copies of music at the start of a new season, putting music into packs for each person and preferably putting them on seats in advance all avoids crowding and unnecessary handling of music. Make sure you follow good cleaning procedures if you are the one sorting the music. In some cases music could be emailed in advance, with each singer bringing their own.
- Use of face masks. Face coverings are no longer a legal requirement in England, but government advice is still to wear them indoors in crowded public places. Whether you decide to continue to sing with masks will depend on other risk factors such as size of venue and ventilation, and on the views of your members. If you choose to sing with masks, singers' masks, which have a lightweight frame, do make it easier and a list of some of them is [on our website](#).
- Instruments and any other equipment. If you use a piano make sure it is cleaned before and after use by each person. Any other instruments or equipment should not be shared.
- Hand sanitizing. Make sure there is hand sanitizer available and/or handwashing facilities and encourage people to use these frequently.

Have a protocol in the event of infection

Of course, we all hope that careful planning and the following of all the guidelines will result in safe rehearsals for everyone. However, in the event of someone developing COVID-19 symptoms and/or testing positive, you should have a protocol in place. Some of this is covered in any case by NHS Test and Trace, but as a group with a known list of people, you can also help to mitigate against possible consequences by having your own procedures in place too.

Have a nominated person for members to contact if they develop symptoms and make sure everyone knows who this is. The person could be someone on the committee if you have one, or a member of the choir, or if you run a choir as a sole-trading business, then the contact will probably be you. If you are a church choir, the nominated



person might be the contact officer for the church. This could be a sensitive area and needs careful handling: people may be very reluctant to give the information out, but in the spirit of meeting together safely as a group, it's important that the information is shared. NB Data protection: the name of the person concerned should not be given out to other members without their consent.

If the person tests positive, they will be asked to give details of their recent contacts and NHS Test and Trace may then either contact your rehearsal venue for details of those who were present at your rehearsal or directly via the NHS app if they signed in that way.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/maintaining-records-of-staff-customers-and-visitors-to-support-nhs-test-and-trace>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>

In the meantime, your own plan should include making it clear to singers that they should inform your nominated contact as soon as possible if they develop symptoms.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person>

More information

[See our website](#) for the latest links to government guidance, risk assessment and lots more helpful resources.

We wish you all a safe and enjoyable return to singing!

If you have further queries, do get in touch with us [via our website](#).

Prepared by **abcd** to help, advise and guide choir leaders. This advice is for general guidance only and does not represent any instruction or encouragement to return to or begin singing. **abcd** can accept no liability for the consequences of your decision, including any illness or other adverse impact. We strongly recommend that you and your choir ensure you have adequate insurance.