

## abcd Guidance on Risk Assessment

### Getting your choir back – practical considerations

This follows the Government guidance published by the DCMS on 13 August and the following revisions:

- 21 August 2020
- 17 September 2020
- 24 September 2020
- 28 September 2020

### About our guidance

Prepared by **abcd** to help, advise and guide members. 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.

The guidance applies to England only; 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.

Guidance for Scotland is [here](#)

Guidance for Northern Ireland is [here](#)

Guidance for Wales is [here](#).

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 current 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.

Professor Martin Ashley has published a pre-print version of his second research paper, covering risk assessment and management: 'First Choirs Standing? What risks were taken by choirs returning early to singing during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, how were the risks managed and what were the outcomes? You can find it [on his website](#).

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.

**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.**

Scientific research into singing during COVID-19 is still ongoing and may well change the current guidelines. In addition, there are frequent changes, both locally and nationally to social guidelines, which may well affect whether choirs are allowed to meet and whether it is appropriate for your choir to meet. Not all choir members may feel it is appropriate for them personally 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 guidance concentrates on the basic act of getting back to singing in a rehearsal situation. It does not attempt to cover performance situations or venues at this time.

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 as this can change without notice. 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.

**Local restrictions are being put in place regularly and will take precedence over other guidelines, so check these regularly.**

[Performing Arts guidance \(England\)](#)

[Performing Arts guidance \(Scotland\)](#)

[Performing Arts guidance \(Northern Ireland\)](#)

[Performing Arts guidance \(Wales\)](#)

[Local lockdowns guidance](#)

[Guidance for meeting people outside your household](#) (particularly reference to 'gatherings in COVID-19 secure venues' and 'gathering in larger groups')

[Coronavirus outbreak FAQs: what you can and can't do](#) (particularly section 3.18)

[Guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities](#)

[Guidance for places of worship](#)

[Guidance for schools](#)

[Guidance for out-of-school settings](#)

## Getting your choir back – practical considerations

Following DCMS guidelines published on 13 August, and the publication of new scientific research, non-professionals were allowed to start meeting again.

From the [Government Performing Arts guidelines](#):

'Both professionals and non-professionals can now engage in singing, wind and brass in line with this guidance.'

'Non-professional activities should not take place that require social distancing to be compromised.'

'Non-professionals are restricted by rules on [meeting with others safely](#).'

The latest update on 28 September states:

‘It is [against the law](#) to gather in groups of more than 6, where people are from different households or support bubbles. There are a number of exemptions to, and relaxations of, this general rule. For example, some activities, such as those organised for under-18s including education or training supervised activities provided for children, including wraparound care, youth groups and activities, are exempt. In addition, in a COVID-19 Secure venue or public outdoor place, non-professional performing arts activity, including choirs, orchestras or drama groups can continue to rehearse or perform together where this is planned activity in line with the performing arts guidance and if they can do so in a way that ensures that there is no interaction between separate and distinct groups of no more than 6 at any time. If an amateur group is not able to ensure that no mingling takes place between these sub-groups of no more than 6 (including when arriving at or leaving activity or in any breaks or socialising) then such non-professional activity should not take place.’

Following the new government measures announced on 22 September, the DCMS confirmed in the [Coronavirus outbreak FAQs](#) that groups can continue to meet to rehearse and perform.

### **3.18 Can I go to my hobby club / amateur musical group / other leisure activity?**

It is against the law to gather in groups of more than 6, where people are from different households or support bubbles. Some activities - such as those organised for under-18s - are exempt. In a COVID-19 Secure venue or public outdoor place, non-professional performing arts activity, including choirs, orchestras or drama groups can continue to rehearse or perform together where this is planned activity in line with the performing arts guidance and if they can do so in a way that ensures that there is no interaction between groups of more than 6 at any time. If an amateur group is not able to ensure that no mingling takes place between these sub-groups of no more than 6 (including when arriving at or leaving activity or in any breaks or socialising) then such non-professional activity should not take place.’

### **Social distancing and ‘groups of six’**

The ‘groups of 6’ and ‘sub-groups of no more than 6’ has caused great confusion. More than six people can be hosted in a COVID-19 secure venue where this is planned activity (see [Meeting with others safely guidance](#), section 3). This does not mean that a group of 6 can avoid socially distancing – unless people are within the same household or bubble, the usual social distancing rules always apply, just as they would if you were in a restaurant or similar venue. But as in a restaurant, you are not allowed to interact with any other group.

The simplest way to organise your choir is to continue to think of each individual as a sub-group: in other words, **everyone must be socially distanced at all times** unless they are from the same household. This includes on arrival, departure, during any breaks (which we do not advise) and bathroom queue.

### **Responsibility and risk assessment**

*Key points:*

*Read guidelines in detail*

*Check any priority actions listed at the top*

*Take notice of any updates*

From the Government Performing Arts guidelines:

‘Organisations must ensure an appropriate COVID-19 risk assessment is carried out and that the numbers of individuals involved are able to be socially distanced at all times.’

‘Each organisation, self-employed person or participant will need to translate this guidance into the specific actions it needs to take, depending on the nature of their business or activity, including the size and type of organisation, how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated.’

‘To help you decide which actions to take, you need to carry out an appropriate COVID-19 risk assessment, just as you would for other health and safety related hazards. As part of this risk assessment, you should understand and take into account the particular circumstances of those with different

protected characteristics, such as those who are hearing or visually impaired. This risk assessment must be done in consultation with unions or workers. ‘

‘You must make sure that the risk assessment for your organisation and the places where you operate addresses the risks of COVID-19, using this guidance to inform your decisions and control measures, and taking account of the needs of those with protected characteristics. You should also consider the security implications of any decisions and control measures you intend to put in place, as any revisions could present new or altered security risks that may require mitigation. A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in your environment. If you have fewer than five workers or participants, or are self-employed, you don’t have to write anything down as part of your risk assessment. Your risk assessment will help you decide whether you have done everything you need to. The Health and Safety Executive has [guidance for business on how to manage risk and risk assessment at work](#) along with [specific advice to help control the risk of coronavirus in workplaces](#).’

‘Organisations have a duty of care to volunteers and non-professionals to ensure as far as reasonably practicable they are not exposed to risks to their health and safety. This guidance around working safely during COVID-19 should ensure that volunteers and non-professionals are afforded the same level of protection to their health and safety as employees and the self-employed.’

‘Failure to complete a risk assessment which takes account of COVID-19, or completing a risk assessment but failing to put in place sufficient measures to manage the risk of COVID-19, could constitute a breach of health and safety law.’

- 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 personally must ensure that you are COVID-19 secure.

### A detailed 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](#).

### Particular considerations for singers

From the Government Performing Arts guidelines:

‘Additional mitigations, such as extended social distancing, were previously required for singing, wind and brass given concerns that these were potentially higher risk activities. DCMS commissioned further scientific studies to develop the scientific evidence on these activities, which has allowed us to reconsider these additional mitigations. Both professionals and non-professionals can now engage in singing, wind and brass in line with this guidance. People should continue to socially distance from those they do not live with wherever possible. Venues, performers and audiences should ensure 2m distancing applies wherever possible.

However, these studies have also indicated that it is the cumulative aerosol transmission from both those performing in and attending events that is likely to create risk. We are continuing to develop more detailed understanding of how to mitigate this potential aggregate risk, but in that context, organisations should therefore consider:

- Maintaining social distancing wherever possible. Non-professionals should not engage in activities that may lead to social distancing being compromised, including not engaging in activities where there is a risk of mixing between separate and distinct groups of no more than six people.
- Ensuring activity takes place outside wherever possible, including performance
- Limiting the number of performers as far as possible with non-professionals being restricted by rules on [meeting people safely](#).
- Limiting the number of audience members, noting that capacity should be maintained at a level that allows social distancing to be maintained
- Limiting the duration of social interaction opportunities ie rehearsals or performances as far as possible
- Taking steps to improve ventilation as far as possible and whenever possible, both through the use of mechanical systems and opening windows and doors
- Taking steps to encourage audiences to support the overall safety of the event, including discouraging activities which can create aerosol (such as shouting, chanting and singing along), seating individuals rather than allowing them to stand (to help maintain social distancing) and the other mitigations outlined in this guidance.
- Continue to take the other vital steps outlined in this guidance, including preventing unwell people from attending, maintaining cleanliness, supporting contact tracing and other mitigating measures.

By considering and adopting these measures cumulatively, the overall risk of the event will be reduced. Organisations must ensure an appropriate COVID-19 risk assessment is carried out and that the numbers of individuals involved are able to be socially distanced at all times.'

You will need to do a risk assessment for each venue and the proposed activity, taking into account how many people can be involved whilst reasonably following social distancing, ventilation, and the activities to be undertaken. The pointers below are intended to help choirs consider how the various risk factors might be addressed and the risk reduced.

## Group size and layout

### *Key points:*

*non-professionals should not engage in any activity which compromises social distancing*

*the number of performers should be limited as far as possible*

*the duration of social interaction opportunities (i.e. rehearsals or performances) should be limited*

### *Consider:*

- Rehearsing in small groups. This will reduce the amount of social interaction and help you to manage the available space with full social distancing. The latest scientific research states that volume has a big impact on the amount of aerosols generated: reducing the number of people in the room can help to mitigate this.
- How can this be managed practically and musically?
- Can you keep in reasonably fixed teams? This has an impact on your musical programme – can you plan suitable music that can be sung by small forces?
- 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.
- 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.

## Finding a rehearsal venue

### Key points:

*You must use a venue which is operating in a COVID-19 secure way*

*Note that it is now **illegal** for gatherings of more than six people to take place in private homes – this includes gardens and other outdoor spaces*

*Take account of available space within social distancing guidelines and work out the possible capacity*

*Good ventilation is vital*

From the Government Performing Arts guidelines:

‘Recognising that within the performing arts it is common practice to operate both in your own and in third parties’ premises or venues, and to hire equipment from third parties, collaboration between groups, organisations and businesses will likely be needed to give proper effect to this guidance.’

‘Ensuring activity takes place outside wherever possible, including performance.’

From the Government guidance for meeting others safely:

### Rules in other venues and activities

‘[As well as the exemptions above], venues following [COVID-19 Secure guidelines](#) will be able to continue to host more people in total – such as religious services in places of worship – but no one should mix in a group of greater than 6. This includes places like a pub, shop, leisure venue, restaurant or place of worship. When you visit one of these places you should:

- follow the limits on the number of other people you should meet with as a group – no more than 6 people unless you all live together (or are in the same support bubble)
- avoid social interaction with anyone outside the group you are with, even if you see other people you know
- ensure that at least one person in your group provides their contact details to the organiser so that you can be contacted if needed by the [NHS Test and Trace programme](#). Checking in using the official NHS QR code is a quick and easy alternative.’

From the Government guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities:

- (section 2) ‘Users and hirers of a community facility have responsibility for managing risks arising from their own activities when they have control of premises and should take account of any guidance relevant to their specific activity or sector.’
- (section 3) ‘Indoor performances to socially distanced audiences can take place presently if in line with the [performing arts guidance](#). Community facilities must not allow singing in groups of more than 6, dancing, or music over certain volumes.’

The wording of this is confusing, however clause 3c makes it clearer that ‘groups’ can be multiple:

‘COVID-secure community facilities are permitted to hold social groups, clubs and activities in groups of no more than 6. Community facilities can host multiple groups of 6, subject to capacity, but groups must not mix socially or form larger groups.

However, we strongly advise that activities where there is a significant likelihood of groups mixing and socialising (and where it will be difficult to prevent mingling and therefore breaking the law) should not take place in a community facility. These may include but are not limited to:

- formal or informal clubs and hobby clubs
- amateur choirs and orchestras
- informally organised sport activities on facilities grounds

Community facilities are now permitted to host socially distanced indoor and outdoor performances in line with the [performing arts guidance](#). Managers and organisers should consider and adopt the mitigations set out in the guidance to reduce the overall risk of the event. These include:



- taking steps to improve ventilation as far as possible and whenever possible, both through the use of mechanical systems and opening windows and doors
- taking steps to encourage audiences to support the overall safety of the event, including discouraging activities which can create transmission from aerosol and droplets ( such as shouting, chanting and singing along) and seating individuals rather than allowing them to stand (to help maintain social distancing)

Both professionals and non-professionals can now engage in singing, wind and brass in line with the [performing arts guidance](#).'

There is detailed practical information about the opening of village halls and community venues, and the practicalities of the 'groups of six' 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 document 'opening your hall after lockdown' is regularly updated and Appendix D on page 23 gives very useful guidance on hosting performing groups and that the government guidance is intended to stress the need to conduct activities safely, not to discourage them.

#### Consider:

- What venues are available. Your usual venue may not be suitable for your purposes at present. Groups must meet in COVID-secure venues or a publicly-owned outdoor space.
- Check your venue's risk assessment and that it is COVID-secure. What are the cleaning regimes? Will you need to do any cleaning before and/or after your rehearsal?
- The size of the space. Maintaining 2 metres between singers is essential – you may need a lot of space! You will need to work out how many singers can fit in the available space. How will you make sure singers stand far enough apart? N.B. members of the same household do not need to socially distance.
- Ventilation. 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 short rehearsal times with breaks for ventilation in your risk assessment, whilst taking note of the 'no mingling' rule.
- Surfaces. Remove surfaces that can be contaminated as much as possible. Can you manage without chairs for a short rehearsal? Can you as conductor provide your own music stand?

#### Who attends rehearsals – reducing the risk

##### Consider:

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

Each individual will need to take a decision about returning, according to their own situation, and about whether they should attend on a weekly basis. Communicate clearly with your singers what your plans are, including sharing your risk assessment, so that everyone is fully in the picture and can make an informed decision.

#### Test and Trace

- All organisations are now required to keep a record of the attendees at their events for a period of 21 days. Your venue will also require this. Find out more [here](#).
- You can register [here](#) for a QR code for display in your rehearsal venue. Choir members should scan the QR code when they arrive, using the NHS COVID-19 app, otherwise you need to take their contact details. If you have contact details of all your members and usually keep a register, then that should suffice, though members can still scan the code if they wish.
- If you use more than one venue, you need to create a separate QR code for each location. You can add multiple locations in the service.

## Within the rehearsal

- 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!
- Length of rehearsal. The recent scientific data notes the cumulative effect of aerosol transmissions. Rehearsal times should be short and make sure you can ventilate the room frequently.
- Arrival and leaving time of singers. These times are potentially less easy to manage than rehearsal time. Can you stagger arrival and leaving times? Is it possible for someone to be on duty to ensure social distancing and that there is no mingling?
- Singing positions. How will people know where to stand? Can you mark the floor up so that everyone has their own space? Can you send out a seating/standing plan ahead so that people know in advance? It's a good idea to photograph the rehearsal so that you have an accurate record of where people were sat, should you need it.
- Conductor's position. As you will be facing the singers, make sure that you position yourself at least 2 metres away from the front row of singers, preferably further. You could consider the use of screens and also amplification.
- Accompanist. If you have an accompanist, they too need to be positioned at least 2 metres away from both singers and conductor. They should not use a page turner unless from their own household and the piano should be cleaned before and after use.
- Music and repertoire. Each singer should have their own music and not share it. Music could be emailed in advance, with each singer bringing their own. Musically, it may not be possible to do the music you would wish to do at the moment. But this might be a good time to try some smaller scale works that you might not otherwise have tackled and having a range of alternative music to suit whatever the current situation is. Consider also that the distance between singers will affect the sound and possibly singers' confidence, if they are used to relying on stronger singers nearby.
- Use of face masks. This is a difficult topic for many choirs, but must be considered as part of your risk assessment. Face coverings need to be worn in most indoor spaces, though there are some exceptions. You can find the latest regulations on face coverings [here](#). There is also more specific information about face coverings in music at 6.2 in the performing arts guidelines, in the guidelines for places of worship and in the guidelines for use of community venues. There are now a number of masks designed for singers available and a list of some of them is [on our website](#).
- 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 singing and speaking. Consider smaller groups and the type of music you sing.
- 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.
- Break times. This can be the most difficult time to control and ideally it would be better to avoid having a break. Remember that the guidelines state that there must not be any mingling 'between separate and distinct groups of no more than six'. If you need to send people out to ventilate the room, you must take this into consideration.
- Refreshments. Ask people to bring their own water or other refreshments.
- Hand sanitizing. Make sure there is hand sanitizer available and/or handwashing facilities and encourage people to use these frequently.
- Don't encourage people to touch their face unnecessarily, avoid warm-up exercises that include this.

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