



Getting your choir back – practical considerations

following the revised Government guidance published by the DCMS on 13 August and updated on 21 August 2020

Following clarification from the DCMS on the guidelines published on 13 August, and the publication of new scientific research, these practical considerations for choirs and their conductors have been revised and updated and we hope that they provide a path forward for everyone making plans to resume activity.

The updated Government guidelines state that:

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

‘there are no set limits on the numbers who can be involved in planned non-professional activity taking place outside and/or in a COVID-secure venue... However, 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.’

‘It is not recommended for non-professionals to consider activities that require social distancing to be compromised. You should also follow rules on gatherings on COVID-secure venues in the [meeting people outside your home guidance](#).’

So it’s now clear that amateur choirs as well as professionals can now start to meet again, but must do so within the rules on meeting people outside your home (under the gatherings sub-heading), and within or at COVID-19 secure venues (whether inside or outside). A detailed risk assessment must be done. We strongly recommend that you read all the relevant Government guidance in detail.

About this guidance

This article will be continually updated and expanded as new guidance and evidence is received. We will also be publishing a risk assessment template in due course, alongside more detailed articles on risk management. Professor Martin Ashley will shortly be publishing a second research paper, the abstract of which is on our Facebook page, 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?’

The current guidelines apply to England only. Guidance for Scotland is [here](#) and Northern Ireland [here](#). Guidance is still awaited for Wales.

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 is still ongoing and may well change the current guidelines. 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 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.



These notes are mainly intended for those involved in **community-based adult choirs**, though some points will be relevant for youth choirs too. 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](#).

Making Music members can access many articles on risk assessment and forward planning [on their website](#).

Responsibility

From the Government Performing Arts guidelines:

‘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.’

‘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.’

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.

Check 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.

[Performing Arts guidance](#)

[Local lockdowns guidance](#)

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

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

[Guidance for places of worship](#)

A detailed risk assessment is essential

From the Government Performing Arts guidelines:

‘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.’

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

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.
- 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 outside your home](#), with planned activity needing to be aligned with the guidance under the sub-heading on gatherings in COVID-19 secure venues).
- 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
- 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.’

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.

Numbers of singers

From the Government Performing Arts guidelines:

‘Households should always remain socially distanced from each other (your support bubble counts as one household) in any location. It is against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place in private homes (including gardens and other outdoor spaces).

Businesses and venues following COVID-19 Secure guidelines can host larger groups. This is also the case for events in public outdoor spaces that are organised by businesses, charitable or political organisations, and public bodies, provided they take reasonable steps to mitigate the risk of transmission, in line with COVID-19 Secure guidance and including completion of a risk assessment.

Within this guidance there are no set limits on the numbers who can be involved in planned non-professional activity taking place outside and/or in a COVID-secure venue. This is in line with guidance on “gatherings in COVID-19 secure venues” in the [meeting people from outside your home guidance](#). However, 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. Organisations and venues will want to minimise the risk as far as possible and [the] guidance sets out a number of mitigations that should be considered when doing so.’

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*

Consider:

- Rehearsing in small groups if you are able to. This will reduce the amount of social interaction and help you to manage the available space. 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 may be 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

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

Good ventilation is essential

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 people outside your household:

Gatherings in COVID-19 secure venues

When meeting friends and family, even in venues like restaurants, pubs, places of worship or community centres, you should follow the guidance on gatherings and:

- only meet indoors in groups up to 2 households – this includes when dining out or going to the pub
- only meet outdoors in a group of no more than 2 households or in a group of up to 6 people from different households

Anyone in your support bubble counts as one household.

Clubs or groups can begin to meet again in COVID-19 secure venues. However, you should take care to remain socially distant from anyone you do not live with or is not in your support bubble. You should also limit social interaction with anyone outside of these formal activities even if you see other people you know. Venues should ensure they comply with COVID-19 secure guidelines.

It's against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place in private homes (including gardens and other outdoor spaces), or in a public outdoors space, unless planned by an organisation in compliance with COVID-19 secure guidance. The government will be introducing fines for those who facilitate or organise illegal gatherings of over 30 people.'

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

'Clubs or groups that use community facilities can begin to meet again and facility managers should follow these COVID-19 secure guidelines to facilitate that.'

'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.'

Consider:

- What venues are available. Your usual venue may not be open yet, or may not be able to accommodate its usual number of groups, and may not be suitable for your purposes at present. Choirs abroad who have started rehearsing have been very inventive, with rehearsal venues including barns and multi-storey car parks!
- Check with your venue that it has done its own 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. 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? Consider shortening rehearsal times with breaks for ventilation.
- Surfaces. Remove surfaces that can be contaminated as much as possible. Can you manage without chairs for a short rehearsal? Do the singers need music stands? 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.

Within the rehearsal

- Keep a register of your singers, including contact details, for possible track and trace. Your venue may require this in any case. Data should be kept for 21 days.
- Length of rehearsal. The recent scientific data notes the cumulative effect of aerosol transmissions. Consider short rehearsal times and ventilating 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 in the same way as we're all becoming used to in shops?



- 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?
- 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.
- Music. Each singer should have their own music and it should not be shared. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Break times. Consider where people can spend any break time, preferably outside the main room, and how social distancing can be maintained.
- 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, avoid warm-up exercises that include this.
- Use of face masks. Masks have to be worn in community centres, youth centres, social clubs, places of worship, entertainment venues and anywhere where social distancing is difficult. You are permitted to remove a face covering if you are undertaking exercise or an activity and it would negatively impact your ability to do so.

*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.*