

## 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
- 16 October 2020
- 5 November 2020
- 1 December 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](#), 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. You also need to check the regulations for the tier your area is in.

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

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

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

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

[Guidance for carol singing \(England\)](#)

[Principles of safer singing](#)

[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. The latest guidance reflects the post-lockdown three tier structure.

The guidance allows for:

- rehearsals to take place in all tiers
- performances to take place where venues are open (currently this is tiers 1 and 2)
- performance to take place as part of worship in all tiers

provided all the guidance is considered and adhered to. There is greater emphasis on individual groups assessing whether they should meet and you should continue to do a detailed risk assessment taking account of all the guidance before deciding whether it's appropriate for your choir to meet.

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

'Singing, shouting and physical activity increases the risk of transmission through small droplets and aerosols. If singing does take place, steps should be taken to reduce the risk of transmission, including limiting the number of people participating as far as possible. The cumulative effect of aerosol transmission means the more people involved, the higher the risk of transmission.

DCMS commissioned scientific studies to be carried out to develop the scientific evidence on singing, wind instruments and performance activities. The resulting SAGE paper can be found [here](#), as well as a [recent paper on principles for safer singing](#) published by the PHE-led Singing and Wind Instrument Group. Organisations should bear its findings in mind and follow the mitigations in this guidance as a result.

When considering undertaking singing or other performing arts activity, the following guidance and mitigations should be followed:

- Where not for work purposes, you should consider the case for proceeding (or not) with the activity given the wider health context in your area and the context of your participants, particularly if vulnerable individuals are involved.
- If you do plan to proceed, you should limit the number of performers as far as possible.
- Even when in a COVID-secure venue such as a place of worship or performing arts venues, individuals must observe guidance on meeting with others safely. The cumulative effect of aerosol transmission means the more people involved, the higher the risk of transmission. It is therefore important to limit the total number of individuals involved in singing or other performing arts activity as much as possible.
- If it is believed to be vital to involve more individuals in activity than the gatherings limits within each tier for the purposes of singing or other performing arts activity, this must only happen in a well ventilated COVID-19 Secure venue or public outdoor space, must be planned activity in line with the regulations, and must be in line with the rest of the performing arts guidance.
- Unless a legal exemption exists (e.g. gatherings are for work) then any sub-group of six in tier 1 or individual household group in tiers 2 & 3 must not "mingle" with any other such group. In practice, this means social distancing should be maintained between each of these groups at all times including when entering or leaving the building and during any breaks. Direction can continue to take place during the activity i.e. between a conductor and a group or reflection between actors and directors, but other physical and social interaction is prohibited.
- Individuals should be positioned in a way that avoids face-to-face singing or other performance as far as possible.
- Consider wearing face coverings where singing or taking part in other performing arts activity where this is feasible, particularly in a non-professional environment.

- Limit the duration of activity as far as possible, including considering the need for breaks, intervals etc.
- Activity should take place outside where possible. Where inside, good ventilation plays a crucial role in reducing transmission. Steps should be taken to improve ventilation indoors as far as possible and whenever possible, both through the use of mechanical systems and opening windows and doors.
- Social distancing should be maintained. In particular, non-professionals should not engage in activities that may lead to social distancing being compromised. Where practical when participating in performing arts activities, individuals should be seated rather than standing to help maintain social distancing.
- From 2 December, audience numbers for indoor performing arts events should follow new capacity restrictions. In tier 1 and tier 2, indoor audiences are permitted provided capacity in a venue is maintained at maximum 50% capacity or 1000 people, whichever is lower. Audiences must be socially distanced and capacity may need to be further reduced to ensure social distancing at all times. In tier 3 performing arts venues will be closed to the public.
- Singing can still take place in front of a congregation, provided it is part of an act of worship. For further guidance on singing in places of worship, please refer to the [places of worship guidance](#).
- Where audience or congregation members are present indoors they should not participate in any activity that can create aerosol, including singing, shouting and chanting. Outdoors, participation by audience or congregation members is permitted, although the other mitigations in this guidance should still be applied, for example adhering to social distancing and considering reduced numbers and duration.
- There is further detailed guidance on managing capacity and managing audiences within other sections of the performing arts guidance. This should include always ensuring at least 2m between any performers and the first row of seated audience members. Further mitigations like screens or other barriers between performers and audience members may also be considered.
- It is vital to continue to take the other important steps outlined in this guidance, including preventing unwell people from attending, maintaining cleanliness, supporting contact tracing and other mitigating measures.'

### Social distancing and 'groups of six'

The 'groups of 6' and 'sub-groups of no more than 6' has caused great confusion. In all tiers, more than six people can be hosted in a COVID-19 secure venue where this is planned activity and the venue is allowed to open. However, 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 (tier 1) or, in tiers 2 and 3, any household other than your own.

The simplest way to organise your choir is to treat 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:

'COVID-19 is a public health emergency. Everyone needs to assess and manage the risks of COVID-19 and in particular organisations should consider the risks to their workers, participants and any audience.'

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.

If you have not already done so, you should carry out an assessment of the risks posed by COVID-19 in your workplace or environment as soon as possible.

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.

You must share the results of your risk assessment with your workforce. If possible, you should consider publishing the results on your website.’

- 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

It is number one on the ‘priority actions to take’ in the government guidance. 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](#).

You will need to do a risk assessment for each venue and the activity, taking into account how many people can be involved whilst 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 activity should be limited as far as possible, including considering the need for breaks, intervals etc.*

*Consider:*

- Rehearsing in small groups to reduce the amount of social interaction and help you to manage the available space with 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. See our webinar and practical hints for streaming rehearsals.
- 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*

*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 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) ‘Events are subject to wider rules around social mixing dependent on an area’s local COVID alert level. This means that, in a COVID-19 secure venue or public outdoor place, there can be more than 6 people in total present from multiple households. In COVID alert level: Medium areas, social interaction and shared activity must be limited to groups of 6. In COVID alert level: High, and COVID alert level: Very High areas, social interaction and shared activity must be limited to groups of the same household or support bubble.
- (clause 3c) ‘COVID-secure community facilities are permitted to hold social groups, clubs and activities in groups are subject to wider rules around social mixing dependent on an area’s COVID local alert level.

This means that, in a COVID-19 secure venue or public outdoor place, there can be more than 6 people in total present from multiple households. In local COVID alert level: Medium areas, social interaction and shared activity must be limited to groups of 6. In local COVID alert level: High, and local COVID alert level: Very High areas, social interaction and shared activity must be limited to groups of the same household or support bubble.

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.

We recommend that you ask all 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.

### Test and Trace

- As well as the self-assessment form, you should keep a record of the actual attendees for a period of 21 days. Your venue will require this anyway as part of Test and Trace. Find out more [here](#).
- Seating plan. We recommend that you send out a seating/standing plan ahead so that people know in advance where to sit. Keep to the plan (you could also take a photograph) so that you have an accurate record of where people were sat, should you need it in the event of an infection.
- You can register [here](#) for your own QR code for display in your rehearsal venue – it's worth discussing this with your venue first so that you are both aware of who is keeping what records. Choir members 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 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, preferably outside as well as inside the entrance, to ensure social distancing and that there is no mingling?
- 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 or put out names on seats. All this will avoid confusion and singer unnecessarily mingling with each other whilst trying to find their place. Ideally you should put into place a one-way system to avoid singers accidentally crossing paths.
- 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 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' in Tier 1 and no mingling at all in Tiers 2 and 3. See the advice on page 4 above. 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. 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.

## 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 required 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.

If the person tests positive, they will then be asked to give details of where they have been in contact with people and NHS Test and Trace would then contact the nominated person and/or your rehearsal venue if appropriate for details of those who were present at your rehearsal.

<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 (who should then inform the committee if you have one). As a precaution you should cancel your next rehearsal, or until a negative test has been received. You may also wish to contact those who were seated nearest to the person concerned.

NB Data protection: the name of the person concerned should not be given out to other members without their consent.

<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>

If you are made aware of more than five infections in your group within 14 days of each other, you should contact your local Public Health England Health Protection Team. You can find contact details here and more advice on how to proceed:

<https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/reporting-an-outbreak/resources/small-and-large-gatherings-workplace-action-cards/>

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.