



COVID-19 INTERIM GUIDANCE FOR BHS ENSEMBLES AND SINGING COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

In light of the current public health emergency, we are all wondering when we might be able to safely sing together again. Just as we understand that voices united in song can make a positive and meaningful impact on ourselves and those around us, we should also recognize that we must work together to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Regardless of the various phased reopening plans that states, provinces, and communities have in place, **legal reopening or congregating is not equivalent to safely singing together in the same physical space.** It may be a while before it is safe for everyone to sing together. How long and in what ways are still to be determined. It is important to note that there is not a single solution that will work for everyone.

Please use your best judgment and follow all applicable national, provincial, state, and local laws, policies, and procedures when applying the information in this document to your unique situation. In general, this guidance is based on a collection of scientific research and other information from various and verified sources. We ourselves are not scientists or medical professionals - we are singers.

For the most up-to-date medical information and guidance, please visit the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html or the World Health Organization (WHO) website: www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus

BACKGROUND

What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory virus that was identified in late 2019 and declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020. COVID-19 is an international, national, and local health emergency. Anyone can contract the disease, with older adults and those with serious underlying medical conditions potentially at a higher risk for more severe illnesses. There are many common sense measures that individuals should take to protect themselves and others such as washing hands frequently, avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands, avoiding close contact with people who are ill, covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, wearing a face covering or mask while in public, and frequently disinfecting surfaces that are often touched.

What are the symptoms?

People with COVID-19 have presented a wide range of [symptoms](#) from mild to severe, and in some instances with no symptoms at all. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after being exposed to the virus.

Who is at risk?

Anyone, regardless of age, may become infected. Certain underlying medical conditions or environmental factors may increase the risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

How does the virus spread?

Coronaviruses like COVID-19 are most often spread from person to person:

- Between people who are in close contact of one another (within 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or sings.
 - These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- Reports suggest that surface transmission is possible, but can be mitigated by frequent hand washing.
- COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.

How does this apply to singers?

Science suggests that the physical act of singing creates more aerosolized droplets than any other form of vocalizing. Aerosolized droplets can travel farther and remain in the air longer than droplets created by breathing or speaking. No existing barrier method or technique can be applied to singing that makes it safer in that regard. When singing with good breath support, small airways in the lungs close, then reopen during deep inhalation, releasing increased droplets to be emitted during singing. Deep breathing also facilitates airborne droplets entering deep into the lungs, rather than only into the nose and pharynx.

While these initial findings do not seem like the best outlook for singers, more studies are needed to gather data about how the virus spreads.

THE CHORAL ECOSYSTEM RESPONSE

Science and the Near-Term Future of Singing

On May 5, 2020, a webinar addressing the future of singing was held in an effort to seek fact-based solutions in protecting singers, music educators, and conductors. It was a landmark collaboration, bringing together science, medicine, and arts management to provide clear-eyed, fact-based evaluation of the challenges we face.

Watch here: <https://www.barbershop.org/covid-webinar-summary>

Singing: What We CAN Do

On May 26, 2020, choral leaders gathered again for another webinar that offered examples of how singers and singing ensembles are producing their art now, as physical distancing guidelines continue to be in place. A variety of guests shared promising projects and existing and emerging technologies that keep us connected and singing.

Watch here: <https://www.barbershop.org/webinar-what-we-can-do>

WHAT'S NEXT?

University of Colorado Study

A number of performing arts organizations have joined together to commission a study on the effects of COVID-19 on the return to the rehearsal hall. It is important to understand what risks exist in performing arts classrooms and performance venues. Specifically, the study will examine aerosol rates produced by wind instrumentalists, vocalists, and actors, and how quickly those aerosol rates accumulate in a space. Although not yet proven, strong anecdotal evidence suggests that the COVID-19 virus can travel in the microscopic droplets expelled from a person with the virus, even when asymptomatic. The only way to determine what risk level exists or to create best practices for reducing infection risk is to understand how aerosol disbursement works in a performing arts setting.

Once the aerosol rates are better understood, the study will focus on remediation of aerosols in confined spaces like rehearsal rooms (both educational and professional), classrooms, and performance settings in order to develop better understanding, policy, and practice for a safe return to performance and education.

Dr. Shelly Miller at the University of Colorado will lead the scientific study and says, "Aerosol generating activities have the potential to transmit COVID as the research shows, but we have very little data on what kinds of generation happen when playing instruments. We will be studying this phenomenon (hopefully with funding) in our aerosol laboratory at the University of Colorado Boulder and with this data, will be able to provide better evidence-based guidance."

Several national and international performing arts education organizations are combining resources to study the effects of COVID-19 aerosol transmission in performing arts performance settings. The study is a massive undertaking that will require a focused effort from many organizations, including the Barbershop Harmony Society. This effort will be a duplicated study and will test how aerosols can spread from brass and woodwind instruments, the four vocal ranges, theatrical speech, and aerobic breathing. Together this collective group of organizations can create scientifically proven methods for our return to performing arts in a safe way with research showing us best practices and advocacy.

CONSIDERATIONS

First, please understand that nothing is risk free. Circumstances and conditions vary by location, so be sure to follow any and all guidelines set forth by local, regional, state/provincial, and/or national governing agencies. Also bear in mind that most guidelines are not geared towards singers. Physical distancing should be enhanced to at least 8-10 feet at minimum and more if possible. Always exercise an abundance of caution. We are not suggesting that all ensembles should be rehearsing at this time. If you decide on your own to get together, develop a detailed plan of action and use your best judgement.

General Guidance for All Singing Communities

1. **Evaluate the Risks** - Many factors will affect your ensemble's decision to rehearse, so educate yourself with science and facts before you decide to get together. Some of the risks include: age, health status, underlying medical conditions, exposure to other individuals, local infection rates, and more.
2. **Be Flexible** - Depending on your situation, it may not be possible to gather for rehearsal immediately. If you do decide to get together, develop an action plan for your group and stick to it. As more details are learned about COVID-19, your action plan may change.
3. **Be Responsible** - If you feel sick, stay home. If anyone in your immediate family is at higher risk, be overly cautious. If there's a chance you've been in close contact with someone who might be infected, self-isolate and monitor your own health closely.
4. **Sing Outdoors** - Continue enhanced physical distancing, stand in a straight line, and keep the wind at your back.
5. **Wear Masks** - Singing may be more difficult while wearing a mask, but a mask will decrease the risk of droplet and aerosol spread.
6. **Shorten rehearsals** - Singing together for a shorter amount of time will reduce the possibility of exposure.
7. **Cleanliness** - Disinfect surfaces that are touched often and wash your hands regularly. Don't share sheet music, water bottles, pencils, or other rehearsal-related objects.
8. **Learning Tracks** - If in-person rehearsal is simply not possible, you can use [learning tracks](#) to introduce new music or polish existing repertoire while keeping singers engaged.
9. **Virtual Rehearsal** - Stay connected with your ensemble by hosting [virtual rehearsals](#) and meetings.
10. **Virtual Performance** - Consider creating and sharing a [virtual](#) performance of your ensemble.
11. **Singing indoors is not recommended at this time** - The results of the University of Colorado study that are expected in late July will allow us to offer more detailed information.

Quartet Guidance

1. **Form a "Quaranteam"** - Creating a [Social Bubble](#), or [Quarantine Pod](#), may be an option for your quartet. While it is not without risk, this may be a way to increase social interaction while limiting exposure and risk. How it works: A small group of people (quartet members and their families) choose to limit outside contact in order to interact with each other.
 - a. Everyone must agree to follow the rules your group sets for all social interactions and be completely open and honest about their actions. Individual behavior that doesn't follow the group rules can increase the risk for everyone involved. Discuss what will happen if the rules are broken or if someone is exposed. If anyone on your quaranteam starts to show symptoms, everyone should self-isolate for 14 days.
 - b. Decide how much risk is acceptable and develop protocols. While some individuals might be okay with in-home visits by family and friends outside the quaranteam, others are not. For example, some families wear masks for every interaction outside the home and others don't wear masks at all. Some families have decided to meet in larger groups for holidays or celebrations, and others do not. These are among the details you should discuss.
 - c. Maintain the agreed upon physical distancing rules outside your quaranteam, and be honest if you think you may have been exposed.
 - d. Communicate daily. We are learning more about the pandemic every day and your quaranteam should adjust with the changing realities.
 - e. Each person should consider getting tested to prevent asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic spread of the virus. This is a good first step when creating a new quaranteam.

Chorus Guidance

1. **Small Groups are Safer** - Any chorus, regardless of size, may be able to find different ways for members to gather together in smaller groups. Research suggests that small ensembles will be able to safely sing together much sooner than larger ensembles.
2. **Consider Sectionals or VLQs** - Depending on your local guidelines, it may not be possible or advisable for everyone to gather together at the same time. Remember to maintain enhanced physical distancing and sing outdoors.
3. **Form "Quaranteam" Quartets** - Encouraging small groups to form quaranteams as outlined above may be an option for your chorus.

Insurance Considerations

Many have asked the question, "*If and when we begin rehearsals and or performances, what is our liability and what does our insurance cover if a member or one of our patrons becomes infected with the COVID-19 virus.*"

- **Ultimately the answer to that question is a legal one that we (Harmony Hall) or our insurer cannot answer with any confidence.** As a practical matter, our insurance policies have not changed and continue to provide appropriate general liability coverages for our singing communities. There are no exclusions for pandemics or communicable diseases. *The insurance industry is in turmoil around these issues, though, as liability and causation issues are causing risks to be re-evaluated.* As always, we recommend that all singing ensembles follow CDC guidelines. Failure to follow CDC / governmental guidelines exposes a chapter to the increased risk of being found negligent and liable for the risks/injuries caused to individuals (members, guests, etc.). It is unclear how an individual will establish causation for contracting COVID-19, though an organization does face increased risks if it does not take appropriate and reasonable measures to prevent the spread of the disease. Ultimately the magnitude of that risk may be different depending upon local circumstances. For example, quartet/small group singing maintaining appropriate distancing outdoors and hygiene practices may pose minimal risk (though not zero), but a large gathering may violate local laws or regulations and may be dangerous to the health of participants knowing what we do about singers as "super-emitters."
- The risks inherent with the pandemic vary across the U.S. and Canada depending upon where you live. Nevertheless, experts continue to speak of the dangers of larger groups singing together and risks to audiences. Group singing has been identified by the CDC as a super-emitter with risks associated with the transmission of the disease based upon exposure to a contaminated individual. Harmony Hall continues to work closely with district leaders on the timing and review of all BHS events like District Conventions, Midwinter, and International. Harmony Hall is gathering data and information now to help chapters and singing communities navigate these challenging issues and a new normal while we await vaccines and/or cures.
- We remain focused on the health and safety of our members, guests, and audiences to ensure we are not being reckless in exposing our stakeholders to the risks associated with the pandemic. Even though our insurance policies provide coverage, we want to be prudent and focus on the safety of our communities first and continue to recommend adhering to local authorities and CDC guidelines as it relates to gatherings.
- **A Note On Waivers:** The use/signage of a waiver does not necessarily absolve an organization of their duties of care (i.e., it may convey a false sense of security), but it also does place greater burden on the participant to acknowledge the risks they are voluntarily exposing themselves to. Important to note that while it is probably a good idea, a waiver is not a one-size-fits-all solution for allowing in-person rehearsals to resume as usual.

RESOURCES

Health Information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>
 - [How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)
 - [Daily Life and Coping](#)
 - [Considerations for Events and Gatherings](#)
 - [Considerations for Community-Based Organizations](#)
- World Health Organization (WHO) - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Government of Canada Resources - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>
- Coronavirus Resource Center - Johns Hopkins University & Medicine - <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>

Quaranteam Information

- [A guide to negotiating a covid “bubble” with other people](#)
- [How to form a COVID-19 social ‘bubble’ or ‘quaranteam’](#)
- [How to form a COVID-19 social bubble](#)
- [The Dos and Don’ts of ‘Quarantine Pods’](#)

COVID-19 Collected Resources and Articles

- https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1PZ8RF3EytzUWGwfjNpu4fsyXc4E_u2Yi