

COVID-19 - Guidelines for Vocalists and Instrumentalists



The COVID-19 pandemic has led us to reconsider our typical practices and how they may contribute to the transmission of infection. Music is an important part of society and integral to many cultural practices. These guidelines are meant to assist music educators (both within and outside of the education system), amateur or professional vocalists, instrumentalists and organizers of music groups.

Singing and playing wind instruments may produce respiratory droplets and aerosols. However, it is unclear how much this contributes to the transmission of COVID-19. Despite a number of reports linking COVID-19 outbreaks and super-spreader events to singing or playing wind instruments, studies have been unable to conclude whether the transmission risk relates to singing, playing instruments, or other contributing factors associated with musical events such as:

- crowds
- contact for long periods of time
- social interaction
- sharing equipment
- singing or playing in enclosed spaces with poor ventilation

As evidence regarding transmission risk continues to evolve, the following guidelines have been developed to guide vocalists and instrumentalists in taking measures to protect themselves and others.

General guidelines:

- [Focus on the fundamentals](#). Check yourself for symptoms every day, stay home when you are sick (even if symptoms are mild), get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19, practice proper hand and cough hygiene, maintain physical distancing and wear a mask when physical distancing is not possible, or where required. For more information on symptoms and testing guidance, use the [COVID-19 Screening Tool](#).
- Review and follow current [Public Health Orders](#), including if performances are allowed.
- People at higher risk of serious illness (including people with chronic health conditions, a weakened immune system or people aged 60 years or older) may consider waiting to return to these activities, when they involve other people, until public health advice changes because of COVID-19 immunization and lower transmission risk.
- Virtual opportunities should continue to be offered or should be explored for those who are not able to attend classes, rehearsals or performances, or who may prefer to participate in these activities from home. Use alternatives such as pre-recorded audio or video, virtual training or recording sessions.
- Performers and audiences should follow gathering size limits. Rehearse in separate, smaller sub-groups wherever possible. Preference should be given to outdoor sites for classes, rehearsals or events to further minimize risk. Limiting your group size to the smallest possible will minimize risk, and musicians should also limit the number of performance groups they participate in.

- If the activity is indoors, minimize the time that people are together. There is currently no evidence on a specific amount of time that is safe.
- Ensure that ventilation systems are operating and functioning properly. If possible, increase ventilation by opening windows. Use a large space that can accommodate physical distancing. Allow a break between groups for air exchange in the room, with the time frame between groups based on the room's air exchange. For more information, visit the Public Health Agency of Canada's [Guidance on Indoor Ventilation during the Pandemic](#) page.
- Organizers (whether it be a class, practice or performance) should maintain a list of individuals present and contact information for at least 21 days to enable public health contact tracing, if needed.
- Ensure there are hand sanitizers on site, in the rehearsal rooms or in performance settings.
- Individuals should bring their own pre-filled water bottles. Water bottles should not be shared. If water is provided in cups, they should not be refilled.

Physical Distancing:

- Seating or standing arrangements should be as far apart as possible, and allow for at least a two-metre or six-foot separation between chairs and participants. The space for physical distancing also needs to take instruments into consideration. The length of a person's instrument should be considered an extension of that person, and should be accounted for when determining the space between people.
- In addition to the physical spacing, stagger people's positions, so they are not directly in front of each other. Consider placing floor markers as a visual cue.
- Increasing the minimum distance between the audience and the performers is recommended. Consider blocking off the front two rows of seating. The audience should be advised that there should not be any singing along, cheering or yelling.
- Have people face away from others, or all face in the same direction, while singing or playing wind instruments.
- Consider placing a physical barrier in front of the vocalist or musician as another way to reduce risk of transmission. The barrier needs to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each use.
- If live music is being used for ambiance, consider the volume of the music. Lower music volume may allow the other individuals present to more consistently practice physical distancing, so they will not lean in towards each other or talk louder to hear each other.
- Members of the performing group should not mingle with audience members, patrons, venue staff or volunteers during or after performances.

Cleaning and Disinfecting:

- Facilities, including commonly touched surfaces, should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after use. Cleaning and disinfecting must be done with [Health Canada approved disinfectants](#) that kill viruses.
- Equipment (e.g. music stands, microphones, amplifiers, mixers, chairs, pens or pencils) and sheet music or devices with electronic sheet music should not be shared. If they are shared, disinfectant wipes should be available for frequent cleaning and disinfecting. Frequency and additional cleaning and disinfection information can be found on the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) site.
- Uniforms or gowns should not be shared and should be **laundered after each use**.

Masks:

- Mask-wearing is recommended in both indoor and outdoor settings, including when singing if feasible. Check the current [public health orders](#) for additional details on settings where masks are required.
- Wind instrument players should only remove their face masks immediately before playing. Face masks should be put back on after they have finished playing. The [Mask Guidance for Manitobans](#) site includes instructions for proper reuse of masks and additional information.
- Masks with slits at the mouth to fit mouthpieces are not specifically recommended as their impact on the risk of transmission is unknown. If used, these masks should NOT be worn outside of the performance space, and must be replaced with an unaltered face mask immediately after playing.

Specific considerations for instrumentalists:

- Consider the placement of instruments in the room based on their risk of droplet release (e.g., flutes placed where exhalation would not be directed at other musicians).
- Instruments, including accessories (e.g. drum sticks, mallets and guitar picks) should not be shared. If shared access to instruments and accessories is required, then they need to be thoroughly cleaned, as per standard protocol for the instrument, after each use and between users.
- Mouthpieces should not be shared.
- Masks or bell covers for instruments can be used to prevent the release of aerosols during playing. An alternative for flutes is a pop screen in front of the mouthpiece that can reduce forward projection of droplets and aerosols. Fabric covers and pop screens should be placed in a closed plastic bag and laundered between each use with hot water and soap.
- Regular cleaning of instruments, mouthpieces and accessories, as per standard protocol, is essential. Instrument brushes should be used where applicable. Do not share cleaning cloths or instrument brushes.
- Cleaning of individual instruments with saliva build-up should be done outside of the group setting to reduce the risk of exposure.
- For instruments where the cleaning process involves blowing into the instrument to clear out the accumulated saliva, empty valves away from others by blowing into a cloth or closed container to collect the liquid, or onto a disposable absorbent pad. The cloth should be disposed of immediately or placed in a closed plastic bag for laundering. While doing this, ensure that you are alone. If others are present, ensure they are wearing masks and are distanced at least two metres or six feet from you. And potentially consider using a barrier (e.g. plexiglass) to separate yourself from others. If a barrier is used, it needs to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after use.
- Wash your hands after cleaning your instrument or handling your mask or bell cover for the instrument.