

This is a working document that will be updated based on public health guidance which is evolving at present, and responsive, as the vaccination programme continues and Irish society returns to work/activities.

There is a legal duty of care as a singing group to each other and to the public.

Updated 10/09/2021

***We advise that you check back for updates regularly**

- Activities should be carried out in accordance with public-health advice
- Remember, vocal projection and singing and certain instruments create greater risk of aerosol spray, which requires additional physical distancing, protective measures, and ventilation. This is similar to other activities (e.g. indoor sports) where greater aerosol spray is also a risk.
- Possible exemptions may be made ahead of each restriction change depending on the prevailing health situation at the time.
- Personal Responsibility: All individuals will need to continue to monitor the ongoing risk from the disease and take personal responsibility as they take steps individually and collectively in their everyday lives to keep this risk under control.

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Introduction

A **hazard**, as defined by 'is something that can cause harm', and a **risk** 'is the chance, high or low, that any **hazard** will actually cause somebody harm'.

Without proper preparation and planning suspected/confirmed cases of Covid-19 can put singers and public welfare at risk. From the 20th September 2021, before going back into rehearsals every singing group should complete a Covid-19 specific risk assessment to identify what measures will need to be implemented to control the risks associated with the transmission of Covid-19.

Risk Assessment covering exposure to Covid-19 will differ from one group to another. The purpose of this guide is to pose the questions that need to be asked so that appropriate risk assessments may be created specific to your place of assembly and include all group members and other third parties.

Public health guidance around risk mitigation measures is due to change on 22nd October. Details will be shared after updates from Government.

Context

Before the risk assessment is undertaken, the assessor must first ask:

- who is doing what and how?
- where they are doing it and
- who is likely to be affected by these actions?

Understanding the tasks or activities is vital to assess exposure and to qualify any subsequent control decisions.

Risk Assessment Hazard

The risk assessment must recognise the virus as a hazard. It should reflect that the virus is spread in minute water droplets and aerosolisation that are expelled from the body through;

- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Talking, singing, breathing

⇒ The important role of ventilation

⇒ The virus can be transferred to the hands and from there to surfaces.

⇒ It can survive on surfaces for a period after transfer (depending on such things as the surface type, its moisture content and temperature).

- ⇒ The risk assessment should conclude that if it is passed from one person to another, while many survive infection, some may die from the disease.
- ⇒ It should be regarded as a high hazard especially for unvaccinated members

Likelihood

Exposure

Consideration must be given to how exposed people are to Covid-19. There are a list of questions to consider and this is not an exhaustive list, as your specific place of assembly will have specific considerations along with other factors to consider:

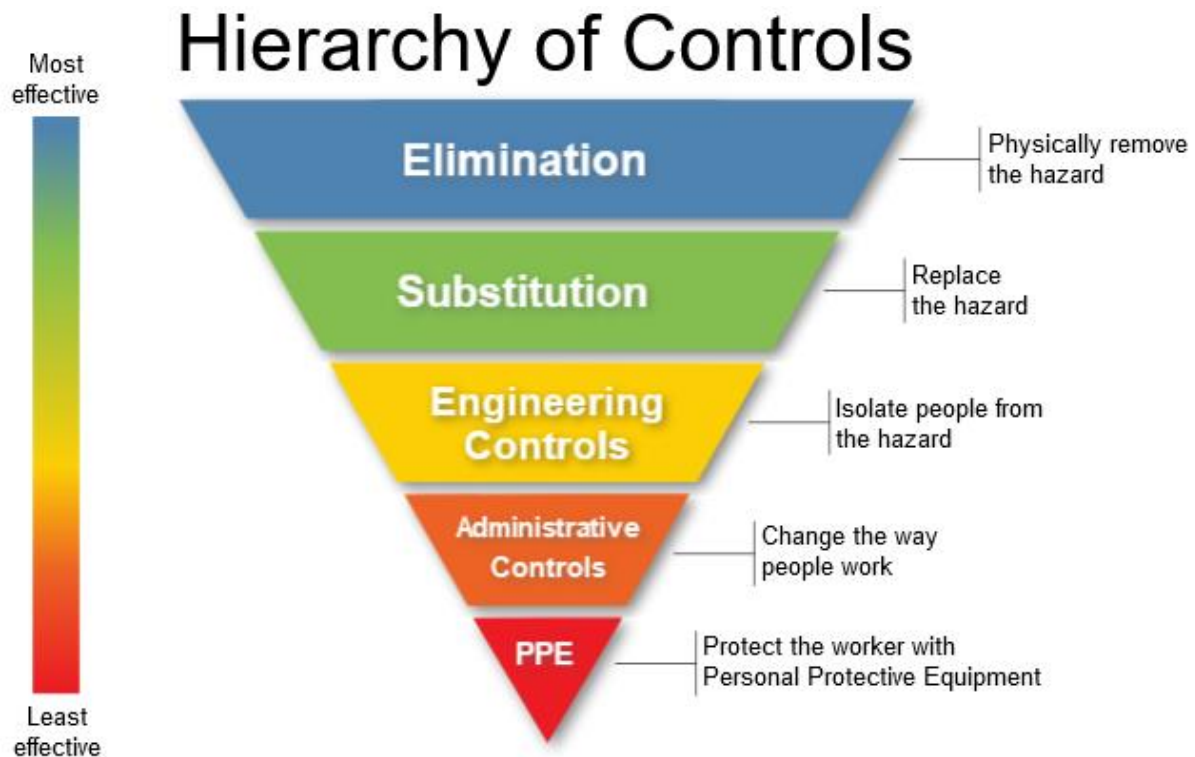
1. How might people come into contact with infected people, how frequently and for how long?
2. How do singers travel to practice and does this expose them to public crowds?
3. Do you know who within the group are in the vulnerable groups, with underlining medical conditions which makes them more susceptible to the disease? How do you capture this information?
4. Do you know who have people in their household who may have increased exposure to the disease?
5. If someone in a singer's household must isolate, what will you require your singer/member to do?
6. The increased risk of exposure where singers meet people who may be carrying the virus and the importance that somebody should not come to rehearsals if they feel unwell?

Once the answers to the questions are understood, controls to mitigate them can be better considered and implemented.

Control

The safety of hierarchy of control can serve you well in considering what can be done. Any mitigating controls devised and implemented must reduce the exposure of singers, venue workers, contractors, and members of the public.

Control considerations must include identification of those who may have the disease, preventative measures of what to do and if a group member or member of the public has contracted the disease. In other words, there may be elements of management systems design to think about. Decisions about what may be done must be realistic and reasonably practicable: achievable given the resources you have.



Elimination

Elimination is the best form of control. Can we eliminate the virus from the environment? E.G. Rehearse at home online.

Substitution

Can practice of singing be replaced for a period of time, where the group focuses on other requirements or moves its practice online as part of a blended learning approach?

Engineering Controls

Engineering controls are things which place a physical barrier between the person and the hazard or provide mechanical reduction of the hazard.

Ventilation: Rehearse outdoors and if indoors ensure the space is suitable with proper ventilation and space (the larger a space the better!)
Use of CO2 monitors.

Administrative Controls

Administrative Controls provide the best options for most singing groups. The risk assessment must consider, how the space is ventilated, how you will keep the assembly space and equipment clean, adjust your rehearsal practices and ensure people are safe.

Questions and Considerations about designing a safe rehearsal venue should include:

1. Can you redesign the rehearsal space to maintain social distancing?
2. Can you repurpose rooms to spread singers and others out?
3. Do you need to consider reducing the number of singers required to practice in an area? (e.g. singers rehearse remotely from home)
4. Identify the places where people find it difficult to avoid one another (entrance/egress points, foyers/reception, security points, lifts, canteens toilets resource rooms, hot desks)?
5. What measure can you put in place to reduce these busy points. (phased rehearsals, practice rotations, breaks, closures)?
6. Can you provide hand cleaning facilities around the assembly space?
7. Identify the places where most people commonly touch (e.g. door handles, control panels, lift buttons, handrails, kettles etc)?
8. Fresh and clean air ventilation requirements for the room

Cleaning

Agree with the venue what is needed for rehearsals and who will undertake the required cleaning with clear responsibility on returning to practice. Have you:

1. Considered how you keep commonly touched surfaces sterile and how much more frequently they need to be cleaned?
2. Are you using an effective strength cleaner to kill the virus?
3. Have you amended cleaning checklists to ensure all areas that need it, are being frequently cleaned?
4. Considered the impact on your cleaners or contract cleaners (you may need to liaise with your venue on this)? Make sure people have what they need when cleaning as regards PPE etc.
5. Agreed a cleaning schedule with your rehearsal space, pre and post rehearsals. Can the venue leave materials there for the group to assist as part of the venues cleaning procedure?
6. As they clean the viral loading on cloths/ mops will increase, do they have enough to be able to change frequently?
7. Where and how do they dispose of contaminated cloths/ waste bins of tissues?

Equipment

Questions and considerations regarding rehearsal equipment

1. Can equipment be allocated to an individual rather than shared?
2. If equipment must be shared, then how will it be cleaned between uses? (e.g. chairs, desks microphones, pianos/keyboards, chairs and music stands.)
3. If someone falls ill with Covid-19, what deep cleaning process will be necessary on the equipment they have been using and the areas of the building they may have been in contact with?
4. What washing / hand sterilising facilities are available to singers and the public? How frequently should they wash their hands to reduce potential viral load and spread on equipment and in the environment.

Safe Systems of Choral Work

Question and consideration about Safe Systems of Choral practice.

1. Role of the Covid-19 Officer is in place with appropriate resources and support.
2. The role of vaccination within group and pod make up.
3. Provide information to groups re infection control measures.
4. Can group singing work be reorganised to avoid singers being in contact with other? When this cannot be avoided, can the time they are in contact be minimised or can they perform facing away from one another to help to avoid direct droplet spread (although aerosols can still populate)?
5. Can you decrease exposure time through limiting actual singing time with regular breaks? Advised – 1 hr indoors with regular ventilation breaks – break to air the room for 5 mins every 15 mins.
6. Rehearse outdoors.
7. What do your singers need to know about the disease and how they might come into contact with it if going to and from practice, or from their household?
8. How will you deliver this knowledge?
9. How do you ensure choir members know what Covid-19 controls are required?
10. Do the singing group members know how they can reduce exposure to the virus travelling to and from rehearsals/performances? Has advice been provided?
11. What process have you got for singing group members to report possible infection or exposure, and what do you then require them to do?
12. As the country enters a new phase of disease management how will you keep current with advice and how will you update your singing group?
13. What do your singing group managers/committees need to know to enable them to supervise effectively? How will this be communicated and how will they be held accountable for delivering this requirement?
14. Where visiting singers are used, how will you ensure their compliance on applying Covid-19 controls? (what changes are necessary to your induction programme)?
15. Are singers complying with the new control measures and if not, why not?

16. How do you manage people with additional needs?
17. What provisions are there in your singing groups for supporting people with increased levels of anxiety/different experiences of Covid?
18. All singers are encouraged to download the HSE Covid-19 track and trace app and to complete the free Sing Ireland 'Return to Singing' e-course.
19. Do you know the vaccination status of your group? Are all singers vaccinated or is it a mixed grouping with some who are vaccinated and some who are not? You should take a different approach should some in your group be unvaccinated (e.g. pods etc. as detailed below).- *NOTE: you cannot ask an individual to provide information about their immunity status prior to arriving at an activity due to GDPR regulations. Using the covid cert checker instead retains no information.*

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is a tool in the hierarchy of risk control. It is considered the weakest control because it relies on people using it correctly. It introduces many possibilities for error.



Considerations include:

1. At this point, singers are recommended to wear a mask as per the image above. Visors should not be worn instead as aerosols can circulate under visors.
2. If gloves are provided, the virus can still be transferred on the surface. If the wearer then touches their face, they could contract the disease. – Look at frequent hand washing, or sterilisation is a better option.
3. Consider the safe disposal of all PPE, either an available general waste bin (not recycling) or bring home for disposal.

Risk Management

Finding answers to the questions posed will provide a list of possible controls that can be implemented. A risk assessment does NOT control risk. It is the actions of individuals who apply controls that mitigate the risk control action plan making it clear who will do what and by when. The successful delivery of this plan must be monitored, reviewed regularly and updated with new guidance documents when issued by Government.

Spending effort on developing controls bespoke to your rehearsal space/venue circumstances is a waste of time unless performance is monitored over time. Plans need to be in place for routinely reviewing the effectiveness of the controls. It is vital to ensure that these controls are maintained and even improved as our knowledge about the virus, its transmission and its control develops.

Risk Assessment Procedure

1. Assess the likelihood of the hazard occurring
2. Assess the impact of the hazard occurring
3. Establish the Risk (Likelihood x Impact)
4. Plot the risk on the Risk assessment matrix
5. Reduce the risk with reduction/management measures as appropriate
6. Establish the residual Risk

Covid-19 Overview Checklist

Operator must consider the specific requirements of each workspace and rehearsal venue.

Detail	Tick
<p>The Venue COVID-19 response plan communicated to all including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation room and response protocol • Covid Compliance Officer • Contact Log requirements • Health screening 	
<p>The COVID-19 response plan also communicated to those running the choir (e.g. committee) to include child protection or specifics of operator where applicable</p>	
<p>Carry out a Risk Assessment (incl. Ventilation, activity type)</p>	
<p>Update existing occupational health and safety risk assessments and safety statement</p>	
<p>Emergency procedures considering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed internal layouts • Personnel Training requirements • Emergency and medical procedures 	
<p>Create and maintain a communication plan for all relevant stakeholders including: Staff (incl volunteers), Participants and Visitors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not come if you feel unwell, are a close contact or have been instructed to self isolate or cocoon • Bring your own water bottle • Follow the direction of committee 	
<p>All staff/participants to complete 'health screening form' before joining in person rehearsals</p>	
<p>Provide appropriate training and induction for staff</p>	
<p>Implement your COVID-19 safe operating procedures and Infection Prevention Control (IPC) measures as identified in your risk assessment and checklists including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures in place for fully vaccinated or mixed rehearsal groups • Cleaning regime including who is responsible and records • COVID-19 area capacity for each area within the venue to consider activity type, ventilation, available space and social distancing requirements • Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning control measures, see assessment below • Respiratory hygiene • Hand hygiene through information on hand washing procedures and facilities. Hand sanitiser available at entrance to the building and rehearsal venue spaces. • COVID-19 informational signage and instruction in place. COVID-19 symptom checker/poster at the entrance. • Entry conditions and access control- single way entry and exists • When spaces are shared with other groups, plan time to clean all common areas and surfaces. • It is recommended that toilets with restricted access or reduced availability have a 1 	

<p>in, 1 out rule. Suitable hand washing facilities must be available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where required is there access control so that only participants or those involved in the rehearsal are in the rehearsal area. 	
<p>System in place for recording contact details to assist HSE with contact tracing if requested, including attendance times, pod names of participants/staff/visitors</p>	
<p>Vaccine status checks management</p>	
<p>Cleaning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there hand-washing facilities available? • Are there supplies of hand-washing materials – e.g. liquid soap, disposable paper towels, anti-bac hand gel? • Are there enough waste bins? • Sharing of items, including art materials, should be avoided where possible • Are waste bins emptied, cleaned, and sanitised on a regular basis? • Participants clean and sanitise their chairs at the start and end of each session 	

Pod Creation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of multiple pods is to assist in infection control by minimising group contact, while acknowledging that some outdoor and indoor facilities have the capacity to cater to larger numbers of people in a safe manner and within public health guidelines. People participating in pod rehearsals can be from different households. • The number of pods in a given facility or area will depend on the overall size of space available. • The space between pods will depend on the nature, duration, and intensity of the rehearsal but it should be clearly evident that the pods are independent groups not interacting with one another. At a very minimum Social Distancing of 2m between pods should be implemented. • Depending on the frequency of activity (i.e. multiple times in a week) it may be helpful for participants to stay within the same pod. • A conductor may oversee more than one pod and should be counted in the overall numbers. • The conductor should not move freely between pods but rather oversee the activity of the pods. <p>Where a teacher/conductor or rehearsal venue leader is operating on a peripatetic (<i>a person who travels from place to place, especially a teacher/conductor who works in more than one school or college/rehearsal venue</i>) and operating across multiple groups or individuals, they should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining strict distancing requirement with each group • <u>Avoiding</u> situations where distancing requirement is broken, for example demonstrating partnering work in dancing or performance • Making efforts to reduce the number of groups interacted with and locations worked in, to reduce the number of contacts made

Ventilation Assessment

Ventilation assessment of ALL the spaces being used including rehearsal venue space, canteen, toilets.

Considerations	Detail
How will the room be ventilated with fresh air.	Most ventilation is provided by natural or mechanical means or a combination of both of these.
How many people will be using the space including rehearsal venue participants/staff/visitors.	The more people who use an area the greater the risk that an infected person is there, increasing possible exposure to aerosol transmission. <u>Ensuring that rehearsal participants/staff who have symptoms of COVID-19 or are feeling unwell remain at home is key.</u> In addition, reducing the number of people who use or occupy an area will also reduce this risk
How much time will need to be spent in the area?	The longer people spend in an area, the greater the risk.
What activities take place?	Activities that make you breathe deeper, for example physical exertion or shouting, may increase generation of aerosols and increase the risk of transmission.
How large is the rehearsal venue area?	The larger the area, the lower the risk as the virus droplets will be diluted and less likely to build up.
Are there any features in the rehearsal venue which might affect ventilation?	For example, is there large fixtures (curtains, screens etc) in use which might impact cross ventilation air flow?
Do you use open windows?	Cross-ventilation is a good option for window ventilation as it facilitates the quick exchange of room air for fresh air through widely opened windows opposite to each other, where possible.
	Propping open internal doors (not fire doors) may increase air movement and ventilation rate
	Airing rooms as frequently as you can improves ventilation. Open all the doors and windows fully to maximise the ventilation in a room. This may be best done when the room or area is unoccupied
Do you use desk or ceiling fans?	Desk or ceiling fans should not be used in poorly ventilated areas. Fans should only be used in areas where there is a single occupant.
Does the rehearsal venue have Local Exhaust Ventilation (LEV)?	Where rehearsal venues have Local Exhaust Ventilation, the make-up air should ideally come from outdoor air rather than from adjacent rooms.
Air monitoring	CO2 monitor used for rehearsal venues