



## **SUGGESTIONS TO IRISH CHOIRS AND SINGING GROUPS**

*Dated 29/07/20*

*This will be regularly updated to align with Government advice and regulations*

Sing Ireland suggests that groups take their time returning to rehearsals to ensure the protection of their singers and conductors by completing a thorough risk assessment. In any case currently it looks like singing is considered by many experts as more dangerous than other cultural activities. As long as the opposite has not been proven (research is ongoing), people deciding whether and how a live rehearsal may be possible again will carry a responsibility to ensure the safety of their groups. It also means that regular rehearsals of choirs as well as regular performances may not be possible for quite a while and there might be a difference between how and when groups restart activities (differing age demographics, presence of members with underlying conditions, and rehearsal space suitability being important considerations). How we do things now may necessarily have to change again so we ask that groups continue to monitor advice from Government, the HSE (ROI), HSC (NI) and Sing Ireland and that you continue to be adaptable.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NPHET AND GOVERNMENT**

The government has stated that choirs under Phase 3 of the roadmap for easing restrictions have specific recommendations that apply to singing, to choirs and to playing musical instruments in groups and that they are subject to the Phases 3 and 4 restrictions on numbers for public gatherings and other important public health advice. Sing Ireland welcomes this and has put together this document to help singing groups and choirs plan for resumption of activities within the recommendations.

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/77452/39d51b02-5633-4e2f-a070-4551a3521081.pdf>

**Extracted from Government (ROI) advice on Phase 3**

#### ***Group singing, choirs & playing certain brass musical instruments in groups ONLY***

Choir rehearsals have previously been linked to outbreaks in a number of countries (UK, US, Netherlands, South Korea). In addition, there is some evidence emerging that the playing of brass and some woodwind instruments (e.g. trumpets, trombones, flutes) in groups may be associated with a higher risk of infection due to increased droplet transmission or aerosol emission.

Given the potential increased risk of transmission especially due to group singing, choirs and playing brass and some wind instruments in groups, the following precautions are recommended:

- Choir practice, teaching and performance, brass and wind instruments music group practice, teaching and performance should be done while maintaining very strict physical distancing of a minimum of 2 metres from other people, ideally outdoors, limit duration of indoor practice, teaching and performance with frequent breaks to facilitate regular ventilation of rooms and instrument cleaning (where applicable);
- Singers, choirs and musicians of brass and some woodwind instruments should consider protective equipment and measures to minimise the potential for droplet or aerosol emission (e.g. instrument covers, screens, face coverings etc).

– Where group practice or performances are organised, a risk assessment should be carried out to minimise the risk to the participants and their audience, including bearing in mind the age profile and risk factors of the participants/audience in question.

## **Group Gatherings**

### **Indoor gatherings**

Indoor gatherings of up to 50 people when conducted in line with public health advice are permissible.

### **Outdoor gatherings**

Outdoor gatherings of up to 200 people when conducted in line with public health advice are permissible.

Note: any venue/space hired their staff is included in the total number allowed per gathering

## **Singers' responsibility**

If you are unwell or displaying any symptoms of Covid-19 stay at home.

Everyone is asked to consider four things before making a decision about doing something and at all times to evaluate the risk using the DATE method.

**Distance:** Always try to stay 2 metres apart from someone else if possible.

**Activity:** Wash your hands regularly, wear a face covering on public transport or in a crowded indoor space

**Time:** The amount of time you spend with a person or group increases your risk

**Environment:** Always bear in mind that a closed, poorly ventilated indoor space is much riskier than being outdoors.

Social distancing should be maintained at all times.

You are advised to:

- wash your hands well and often
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or bent elbow when coughing or sneezing, and discard used tissue safely
- distance yourself at least 2 metres away from other people, especially those who might be unwell
- limit your contact with others when out and about
- keep your close contacts to a small number of people
- limit the amount of time you spend in direct contact with other people
- avoid crowded areas. If an area looks busy, go somewhere else or return at a quieter time
- wear a face covering in situations where social distancing is not possible, for example shops and busy public transport, or if you are meeting someone who is vulnerable to the virus, for example people who are cocooning. Wearing cloth face coverings may help prevent people who do not know they have the virus from spreading it to others. [Guidance on safe use of face coverings is available here](#)
- keep a log of all of your contacts throughout the day

## SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SING IRELAND

The work of preparing for the relaunch of some rehearsals and concerts is essential, and the time to do that work is now!

- Prepare yourself emotionally that not everyone will be back when you return and that some singers might feel scared about returning to choir
- Discuss with the members of your artistic team and ensure they are engaged and committed.
- Develop a number of prospective relaunch plans in the context of a variety of permissible scenarios
- Have a Health and Safety officer and conduct a risk assessment  
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/safetywellbeing/healthsafetyand%20wellbeing/safetystatementsandriskassessments.html>
- The wearing of masks and shields may provide an important possibility of risk reduction, especially in the world of music. The most important thing about them is that they are worn despite the fact that they can be perceived as being incongruous or disturbing when worn by a singer. Further international research is ongoing relating to this.
- Look at your rehearsal space, numbers attending rehearsals, ventilation. Discuss your risks with your venues. They have guidelines and risk assessments they must carry out also.  
<https://www.theatreforum.ie/forum-notice/reopening-arts-centres-guidelines/>
- Think about getting into a room, distancing chairs (think about side to side but also frontwards eg conductor distance) (Tiered seating won't work without distancing- think of how droplets travel/may fall) , keeping pathways clear so distancing can be maintained, shorter sessions, maybe no breaks, setting up room with consideration of ventilation with new ventilation all the time.
- Make a video if access is different or new space being used to help everyone understand things put in place before they arrive.
- Have a single one direction pathway in and out of rehearsal space where possible
- Communicate to singers that they must conduct their own individual risk assessment. Please note: that the reason someone gives you for not attending may not be the actual reason. (ie they could want to protect someone at home)
- Limit rehearsal length and ideally take place outdoors. Outdoor experiences- ideally somewhere that can contain sound but with ventilation. Note some singers could be too cold and some too warm.
- Keep a clear record and contact details of those that attend each rehearsal and develop a plan that details the steps that will be taken should a choir member/an individual in the immediate circle of a choir member be diagnosed with Covid-19
- Comply with social distancing advice from NPHE- minimum 2m apart. We recommend, in line with international recommendations that inside rehearsals have minimum 2.5m between singers in all directions.
- Hand hygiene to be done on arrival to rehearsal & frequent use of hand sanitiser or washing hands
- Clear explanation to everyone that it is to keep everyone safe, has to be done before and after you touch a surface. Everyone needs to develop touch awareness EG like a no touch challenge. Described as it's a crime scene and you don't want to leave your DNA/fingerprints
- Singers/musicians don't share pens/pencils/music/music stands/chairs/water bottles/cups.
- Keep the piano/keyboard for just the pianist or accompanist
- What are actual rehearsals for? What can we do outside it? What can we do online? Eg- part rehearsals/line learning/discussing phrasing, dynamics on zoom
- If you must meet as a group can it be done in smaller groups/sectionals/mini choirs?
- For the foreseeable future, film all rehearsals so that if a singer is unwell they can stay at home while feeling they are not missing out as they can watch back recordings and learn from it. This will help the choir as one person missing affects the sound. This also gives you documentation of rehearsals.
- Set aside or make a plan for the funds required for your first post-COVID-19 concert
- Consider changes to fees/fee structures in the context of extremely challenging economic circumstances.