

Join Your Voices: The Safe Return to Choral Singing

Decision-Making Protocol

“Join Your Voices” is a call for the safe return to choral singing. Now that a vaccine is available, this may be possible. The question is, “How to make a decision that is safe and that takes into account one’s local situation?” This decision-making protocol may be an answer to that question.

To assist choral leaders in search of a responsible and transparent pathway to return safely to singing, critical aspects and considerations have been compiled from current guidelines and initiatives related to the COVID-19 situation and organized to support a decision-making process.

Foundational stipulations

- No group singing situation can be made completely safe from COVID-19 risk, even with a vaccine now available.
- A return-to-singing decision will be a tradeoff between a mitigation of COVID-19 risk and a focus on group/individual safety and the natural human need to gather and sing as a group.

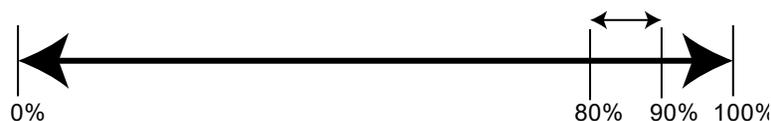
Decision-making process

After appropriate research and discussion by the choral leader and associated others, the following steps complete the decision-making process.

- Identifying an acceptable mitigation of risk level.
- Making decisions based on this level.
- Communicating the rationale of these decisions to participants and other interested parties.

Mitigation of risk

Singing effectively is not possible with the “perfect” level of protection associated with the N-95 (surgical level) mask. However, a risk mitigation range from 80% to 90% might include a level that could be considered. For choral groups with elderly members, risk values near the 90% end of the range would take into account their increased COVID-19 vulnerability. Singers would need to be informed of the selected risk level so they could decide if it is acceptable to them. An even better approach would be to involve singers in the risk level selection.



Making decisions

Selecting a level of risk does not mean reducing all safety precautions. Rather, it provides leeway for singing with precautions that are not practical at the 100% level. This decision-making protocol was developed with a 90% risk mitigation in mind as a starting point.

Critical safe-singing aspects and considerations from the References were organized into tabular form to promote awareness, discussion, and decision-making. Appendix A contains the table with aspects related to the rehearsal/performance **venue**. The table in Appendix B has aspects that relate to **individual participants**.

Each aspect can be examined and discussed, one at a time. Local perspectives can be added in the Notes column of each table. Additional aspects can be added to the empty rows at the bottom of each table, if desired.

All aspects should be addressed in the decision-making process. None should be neglected.

Once these tables have been examined and discussed, the contents can be used as the basis for deciding whether to return to live choral singing or not.

Communication of decisions

With the level of anxiety introduced by COVID-19, it is not sufficient for a choral leader simply to consider all information and make a decision. The decision and its rationale should be made in consultation with others, and be communicated clearly, transparently, and publicly to all potential participants. Everyone must then be given the opportunity to determine individually whether they are willing to accept the risk or not.

The tables in the appendices could serve as organizers for such a communication. The third column Notes would help to localize the summary. These tables also could be used as references by participants for follow up questions and discussions.

This communication process demonstrates respect for the frame of mind of participants and gives everyone the option of participating or not.

Summary

Choral leaders may find these suggestions helpful when searching for a responsible and transparent pathway to “Join Your Voices” and return safely to in-person group singing. However, they must also be willing to accept the concept of a tradeoff as part of the decision-making process.

Additional note: A sponsoring organization (e.g., church or school) might also consider having participating individuals sign a disclaimer based on the decision rationale motivated by this document that acknowledges understanding and accepting the level of risk.

Provided by www.noteablemask.com

References

McBroom, D., & Halstead, L., "Interim Guidelines for Singing during COVID-19," *Performing Arts Medicine Association*.
http://www.artsmed.org/sites/default/files/files/pama_interim_guidelines_for_singing_during_covid19.pdf (Accessed December 8, 2020.)

Naunheim, M., et al., "Safer Singing During the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic: What We Know and What We Don't," *Journal of Voice*. 34 (4), 2020. [https://www.jvoice.org/article/S0892-1997\(20\)30245-9/fulltext](https://www.jvoice.org/article/S0892-1997(20)30245-9/fulltext) (Accessed December 8, 2020.)

Sataloff, R., et al., "Singing and the Pandemic," *The American Organist*, September 2020, 12-13.

Additional Reference

Dr. Lucinda Halstead, president of the Performing Arts Medicine Association www.artsmed.org, has provided the following link to the Aerosol Coalition website so those who want to see ventilation diagrams and the originals mitigation data may have easy access.

<https://tinyurl.com/AerosolCoalition>

Appendix A

**Rehearsal/Performance Venue
Aspects, Considerations, and Notes**

Aspect	Consideration	Notes
Location	Outdoors is preferable. Indoor venues should include active ventilation (and filtration, if possible) in appropriate directions.	
Arrangement	Chairs at an appropriate distance apart (e.g., six feet separation). For worship/performance, maximize singer-listener distance.	
Preparation	Disinfect items touched by multiple people (e.g., chairs, music, folders). Disinfect indoor venue by most effective means.	
Face mask	Select or recommend face mask based on mitigation of risk level compared with mask specifications (e.g., 90% of aerosol particles 5 micrometers and larger are not transmitted).	
Organization	For rehearsals, work in the smallest groupings practicable.	
Duration	Keep event time to minimum (e.g., 30 minutes for group).	

Use the **Notes** column to describe for any aspect the applicable local actions, conditions, restrictions, or perspectives. Use the bottom empty rows for additional aspects that are particularly important to the local situation.

Appendix B

Individual Participant Aspects, Considerations, and Notes

Aspect	Consideration	Notes
Control	Ask participants with symptoms or exposure to self-quarantine. Ask vaccinated participants to self-identify.	
Arrival	Check for temperature, exposure, etc. Confirm vaccination statuses.	
Interactions	Eliminate physical contact between participants.	
Waiting	Maintain appropriate social distance from others prior to event.	
Preparation	Visit rest room, hydrate, and disinfect hands prior to event.	
Contact	Avoid physical contact with items that have been touched by others.	
Breaks	Keep breaks and rest room visits to a minimum during event.	
Face mask	Wear selected/recommended face mask for duration of event.	
Additional hydration	Use drink containers with straws so masks do not have to be removed for hydration.	
Afterwards	Avoid close contact and socializing with others.	

Use the **Notes** column to describe for any aspect the applicable local actions, conditions, restrictions, or perspectives. Use the bottom empty rows for additional aspects that are particularly important to the local situation.