

UPDATED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SINGERS/SPEAKERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On August 6, 2020, the National Federation of State High School Associations released the latest research on aerosol transmission of COVID-19 in rehearsal and performance settings. NFHS formed an international coalition of over 100 performing arts organizations to sponsor and fund this research. The first portion of the study focused on instrumental performance. This newest report includes specific information on singing and public speaking. Final results and recommendations will be released in late November/early December.

It is highly unusual for a scientific team to release recommendations this early in a study. However, with decisions being made about schools and churches reopening, the team believes it is important to release this preliminary information. Refer to the NFHS website for the complete report, a YouTube video of the webinar, and updated information as it becomes available:

<https://www.nfhs.org/articles/unprecedented-international-coalition-led-by-performing-arts-organizations-to-commission-covid-19-study/>.

It is important to note that **none** of the mitigating devices or strategies described eliminate the release of aerosols in singing and speaking. They are simply offered as ways to reduce risk.

The new recommendations center on four areas: **masks, time, distancing, and air flow**. These are some of the important points that I noted pertaining to worship, singing, and classroom/public speaking.

Masks

- Singers and speakers should wear masks at all times.
- Wash your hands before putting on the mask.
- Masks should be multi-layer, surgical style, and either washable or disposable after each use.
- Masks should completely cover the nose and snugly fit the contours of the face – for example, medical grade masks with no gaps that fit tightly around the edges.
- One way to evaluate a mask's effectiveness: does it leave an outline on your face when it is removed?
- Most musicians and public speakers will need two types of masks: one for general use, and one specifically for singing/speaking. (The ongoing study will evaluate masks currently marketed as being designed for singers.)
- Speakers should use amplification and speak at a low, conversational volume.
- Remember: absolutely no talking without a properly worn and fitted mask.

Time

- Duration of in-person rehearsals/classes should be reduced to 30 minutes. (One can assume that this would apply to worship as well.)
- Completely clear the room and allow for a minimum of one complete air change before the next use; three complete air changes are recommended.
- Outdoor rehearsals/classes should have a five-minute break after 30 minutes of singing/playing to allow aerosols to disperse. (One can assume this would apply to worship as well.)
- Note: a 30-minute time limit is recommended, indoors or outdoors, regardless of the size of the space.

Distancing

- Each singer/speaker should be centered in the middle of a 6 x 6 foot square. This applies both indoors and outdoors.
- Singers should be seated in straight lines, facing the same direction. No curved rows or groups facing each other.
- Designate paths and procedures for entering and exiting the room or outdoor space.
- Although not mentioned in this presentation, it has been suggested that teachers/leaders create written seating charts and keep copies on file by date. This will assist in contact tracing if someone in the group is infected.

Air Flow

- Meeting outdoors (without an overhead covering such as a canopy) is always the best option.
- If used, tents/canopies must have high tops and no side panels.
- If meeting indoors, rely on professional facility managers and experts to measure air change rates and design appropriate procedures.
- Utilize online tools found on the NFHS website for calculations and risk estimation.
- Employ HEPA filtration and change filters regularly as recommended.
- Open windows whenever possible.
- Avoid using rooms with no HVAC system.

Additionally, focus on good hygiene

- Frequent handwashing
- Social distancing
- Wearing masks
- Apply these hygienic practices not only in classrooms and meeting rooms, but also in storage rooms, vesting rooms, hallways, and any other regularly used spaces.
- Involve students and meeting participants in cleaning: have them bring 70% alcohol wipes into the room and wipe surfaces before and after touching. Dispose of wipes properly.

Although not covered in this presentation, many churches and schools are establishing **protocols for use of keyboard instruments**. Since sanitizing cleaners may contain ingredients that can damage these instruments, suggestions include the following:

- Limit the number of people playing or touching the organ console, piano, or keyboard.
- Wash hands and use hand sanitizer before and after playing or touching the instrument.
- Persons playing or touching these instruments must wear masks at all times.
- Do not touch any part of your body (especially face, eyes, and hair) while at the instrument. If you happen to do so, use hand sanitizer again before continuing.
- Do not cough or sneeze on the keyboard or into your hands.

Again, please visit the NFHS website for complete information, videos, FAQs, and online tools. Updates are posted as they become available. The Association of Anglican Musicians is proud to be a member of the coalition sponsoring this important research.

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August 7, 2020