

Performing Arts and Public Speaking COVID-19 Guidance

August 10, 2020

Executive Summary:

This document describes the use of cloth masks, clear masks, specialty masks for music, physical distancing, instrument hygiene, and ventilation settings for classes and other activities in the Performing Arts and Public Speaking, including but not limited to Choir, Band/Orchestra, Theatre, and Public Speaking.

Scope and Purpose:

This document is intended to provide more detailed guidance for Performing Arts and Public Speaking activities at Penn State, as a companion document to https://pennstateoffice365.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/KeepTeachingSupportDocuments/_layouts/15/guestaccess.aspx?e=cv9cSw&CID=1ae78390-c447-e45c-0df2-2e11b4f1f591&share=EbdMglg-iKFJpzp_kpo7R4sBHZZuuam6s9LZZIGCg3AXAA

This applies to classes and other activities in the disciplines of Music, including but not limited to Choir, Band/Orchestra, Theatre, including classes, rehearsals, and staged performances; Communication Arts and Sciences and other classes where oral presentations occur; and student groups in the performing arts. This document is not binding to contracted performers, who are expected to create their own COVID-19 protocols to be vetted by the contract holder.

Rationale:

The science of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus that causes the COVID-19 disease is evolving, and we are doing our best to keep up with the science and how it applies to life at Penn State. **NOTE that this is an evolving document:** We will continue to update this and the related documents as we learn more, so please check back often and make sure you are looking at the most recent version of our recommendations. We are basing these recommendations on the following fundamental pieces of information gleaned from a variety of scientific and professional sources (see “References” list at the end of this document):

- The coronavirus is transmitted primarily via respiratory aerosols – droplets of saliva and mucus that are released when a person breathes, speaks, sings, coughs, or sneezes.
- Evidence suggests that projecting one’s voice (as one does when singing, acting, public speaking, etc.) produces a larger aerosol plume than quiet speaking.
- There is also some evidence that it can be transmitted via skin-to-skin contact and by skin contact with contaminated objects.
- All faculty, staff, and students are expected to comply with University face mask requirements.

General Recommendations for all Performing Arts

- Whenever possible, in-person classes, rehearsals and performances requiring projected speaking or singing, wind or brass instruments, and/or dance or other physical exertion should be held outdoors. Performances involving only strings, percussion, and/or pianos are safe to continue indoors with appropriate social distancing. Working outside provides maximum ventilation, and scientific evidence suggests that sunlight kills the virus in air, providing a safer environment for all involved. A tent covering to protect the class from sunburn or rain is still considered an outdoor environment if all sides are open for air to move through. Consideration must be given to wind direction when determining where to place singers, wind/brass players, and others likely to produce larger respiratory aerosol plumes. They must be at the most leeward side so that their aerosols do not blow towards others in or around the tent. Outdoor rehearsals still require social distancing, and mask wearing, and must not last more than 30 minutes, before taking a 5-minute break for the space to vent. A walled tent is effectively an indoor environment, and the ventilation exchange rate of a walled tent cannot be easily quantified.
- Prior to attendance, a person must complete a self-assessment of their health and their exposure history. A person must NOT attend any in-person class if they have any symptoms or were in close contact with an infected person in the previous two weeks.
- Universal masking is required indoors and outdoors, and some alternatives to cloth masks will be further explored for specific needs. Face shields may be used as an additional layer of protection over a mask but are not a substitute for a mask.
- Zoom or other distance learning is still appropriate and preferred for individual lessons and in rehearsal settings for individuals at high risk, who are quarantining, and in the event of further campus shutdowns.
- Social distancing must be maintained, and in some instances (such as choral singing and wind and brass playing) must be increased to a minimum of 8.5 feet.
- For indoor classes, work with OPP/Maintenance on HVAC settings. There must be a minimum of at least 4 full exchanges per hour (more is preferable) with a MERV-13 or better filter and maximal outside air being brought into the room to minimize recirculation. Performing arts with vocal components (singing, wind/brass instruments, acting, etc.) or aerobically active components (dancing) must not be held in spaces with inadequate ventilation.
- Shorter meeting times are required for indoor events, to reduce exposure and give HVAC systems time to cycle air out. A recommended time for airing rooms in applied lesson and rehearsal situations is between 30 and 60 minutes, the latter being for instruments and activities that create more aerosol.

Specific Recommendations for Choir and other Singing activities

- Face masks must always be worn - specific examples of acceptable masks are included in the main University PPE guidelines document. Clear masks are only to be used in place of masks for demonstration or assessment purposes, or in cases where it is essential for the mouth to be clearly seen. <https://www.theclearmask.com/> NOTE: a clear mask is NOT the same as a face shield. Students required to wear specialist masks (music, theatre etc.) must be wearing the

specialist mask immediately prior to entering the building. The specialist mask must be removed immediately after leaving the building, maintaining at least 6ft distance from other people. The specialist mask must not be worn outside of a lesson, rehearsal, or performance.

- A minimum of 8.5' social distance is required between singers.
- Choir rehearsals must be limited to 30 minutes.
- Group warm-ups (physical and vocal) must be avoided.
- Chairs must be arranged on the floor, in rows staggered between the chairs of the row in front, similar to the idea of "choral windows" when standing on risers.
- Singers must be placed in straight lines, facing the same direction.
- Choral risers are not advisable. While no mention has been made about the efficacy of choral risers, due to the varying step-levels there may be an increased risk to singers on the lower, more forward levels from the aerosols generated by higher, more rearward rows.

Specific Recommendations for other Music classes, rehearsals, and performances

- No sharing of mouthpieces or reeds of any instrument.
- No sharing of Wind and Brass instruments. Sharing of non-wind instruments must be greatly limited (e.g. percussionists use personal drumsticks & mallets; string players use their own bows, etc.). If non-wind instruments must be shared, instrument surfaces must be disinfected with approved products before handing to the next person.
- No sharing of sheet music or scripts – each performer is provided a personal copy and is responsible for having it with them as necessary.
- Disinfect surfaces of instruments that must be shared (piano keyboards, timpani, etc.).
- Spit-valves must not be drained on to floors. Drain either into a closeable container that has disinfectant in it to neutralize pathogens, or onto a puppy-pad type absorbent with a nonporous backing. Spit containers should be emptied in a sink. It is imperative that wind players wash their hands thoroughly immediately after each practice session, lesson, and rehearsal.
- Mask wearing and hand/face hygiene are paramount. There must be no talking without a mask. For wind and brass players, when possible a mask with interwoven layers that can open to a small slit for mouthpiece access should be worn while playing. In instrument groups where a mask cannot be physically worn while playing, the mask must be worn over the chin and replaced during periods when the student is not playing. Note: if using the specialist wind-player mask, a bell cover must be used in addition. Students required to wear specialist masks (music, theatre etc) must be wearing the specialist mask immediately prior to entering the building. The specialist mask must be removed immediately after leaving the building, maintaining at least 6ft distance from other people. The specialist mask must not be worn outside of a lesson, rehearsal, or performance.

- Where possible, bell coverings of wind and brass instruments with a pop filter consisting of at least two layers of a minimum 50 denier hose on a wire loop are required. An example for Trombone can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/0s5kAgBAhAk>
- To avoid cross-contamination, cleaning of wind/brass instruments must take place in a different area from instruction/performance.

Specific Recommendations for Theatre, Public Speaking, CAS Courses or other classes where oral presentations occur

- Face masks must always be worn - specific examples of acceptable masks are included in the main University PPE guidelines document. Clear masks are only to be used in place of masks for demonstration or assessment purposes, or in cases where it is essential for the mouth to be clearly seen. <https://www.theclearmask.com/> NOTE: a clear mask is NOT the same as a face shield. Students required to wear specialist masks (music, theatre etc.) must be wearing the specialist mask immediately prior to entering the building. The specialist mask must be removed immediately after leaving the building, maintaining at least 6ft distance from other people. The specialist mask must not be worn outside of a lesson, rehearsal, or performance.
- No sharing of scripts – each performer is provided a personal copy and is responsible for having it with them as necessary.
- For classes, rehearsals and performances involving singing, dancing, speaking, and other activities that can produce larger respiratory aerosol plumes, see the section above “Specific Recommendations for Choir and other singing activities”.

Questions, requests for clear masks, and requests for exceptions or changes to these protocols should be directed to Keefe Manning, PhD, Associate Dean, Schreyer Honors College, Professor of Biomedical Engineering and Surgery, kbm10@psu.edu.

References

4 Tips for Communicating While Wearing a Mask <https://healthtalk.unchealthcare.org/4-tips-for-communicating-while-wearing-a-mask/>

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Clemson white paper: Performing Arts Aerosol study
<https://www.nfhs.org/media/4029952/preliminary-testing-report-7-13-20.pdf>

Communicating Effectively While Wearing Masks and Physical Distancing (American Speech Language Association) <https://www.asha.org/public/Communicating-Effectively-While-Wearing-Masks-and-Physical-Distancing/>

Communicating When Wearing a Face Mask (for medical providers but the techniques might apply to public speaking too) <https://www.swlstg.nhs.uk/documents/related-documents/782-swlstg-salt-face-mask-communication-tips/file>

COVID Communication Skills: Speaking Through A Mask <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLDzTC9VEys>

Covid-19 Masks Effect On Body Language with Communication Expert Mark Bowden <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vEjmKlyxws>

Event Safety Alliance white paper: *The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: for event professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic* <https://www.eventsafetyalliance.org/esa-reopening-guide>

[Initial findings from above study released on July 13:
https://www.nfhs.org/media/4029952/preliminary-testing-report-7-13-20.pdf](https://www.nfhs.org/media/4029952/preliminary-testing-report-7-13-20.pdf)

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Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University Webinar. Leading with Science: Returning to Music Instruction and Performance in the Time of COVID-19. Stephen Gange, PhD, Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health; Jonathan Links, PhD, Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health; Aaron Milstone, MD, MHS, Johns Hopkins Medical School.

Perencevich, E. *Moving Personal Protective Equipment Into the Community. Face Shields and Containment of COVID-19.* <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2765525>

Performing Arts Center Consortium Advisory Committee on Reopening: Guide to Reopening Theatrical Venues <https://www.californiansforthearts.org/covid19/guide-to-reopening-theatrical-venues-performing-arts-center-consortium>

Performing Arts Coalition Sponsored Study on Aerosol Emissions (hosted by Colorado State University) White Paper: *Reducing Bioaerosol Emissions and Exposures in the Performing Arts: A Scientific Roadmap for a Safe Return from COVID19:* <https://smtcd.colostate.edu/reducing-bioaerosol-emissions-and-exposures-in-the-performing-arts/>

Prather et al. *Reducing transmission of SARS-CoV-2.* <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/368/6498/1422>

Return of Pirate Nation: Teaching While Wearing a Mask (Great Tips from East Carolina University) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMcvhqW7jc>

Talking Through Your Mask (tips from a lawyer, pronouncing final consonant) <https://www.johnsonhunter.com/2020/04/30/talking-through-your-mask/>

Teaching While Wearing a Mask: From Zoom to Facemasks (Free webinar on July 17!) <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/teaching-while-wearing-a-mask-from-zoom-to-facemasks-tickets-111235466274>

The science of how you sound when you talk through a face mask (Dominic Watt, Senior Lecturer in Forensic Speech Science, University of York) <https://theconversation.com/the-science-of-how-you-sound-when-you-talk-through-a-face-mask-139817>

UK governmental guidance for performing arts: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts#arts-5-2>

University of Colorado, Performing Arts Aerosol Study, Initial Findings: <https://www.nfhs.org/media/4029952/preliminary-testing-report-7-13-20.pdf>

University of Freiburg white paper: *Risk Assessment of a coronavirus Infection in the Field of Music,* <https://www.mh-freiburg.de/en/university/covid-19-corona/risk-assessment>

University of the Bundeswehr Munich white paper: *Singing in Choirs and making music with wind instruments – Is that safe during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic?* https://www.unibw.de/lrt7-en/making_music_during_the_sars-cov-2_pandemic.pdf

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