

**COVID-19: Guidance for Safe
Music-making in Church**

UPDATE: 9th December 2021 (ii)

This document is based on the guidance from the Government in Westminster, and not arrangements for devolved administrations. Our website contains other information for the UK's devolved administrations [HERE](#); this set of guidance notes has taken the Church of England as the guiding 'church' context.

General principles:

The Government has announced PLAN B. This has only a few material changes to certain Places of Worship, but does reinforce the need to adhere to certain mitigations and protocols that may have slipped over recent months....

Such decisions are generally made more successfully when (all) those who deliver and lead worship have had an input into the conversations about local response. Typically, this might include vicar/incumbent, churchwardens, PCC representation, and the director of music/organist/lead musician of a church.

The nature of these discussions needs to reflect the fact that there will be a range of approaches to risk, and recognise that churches are diverse communities where different groups and individuals have different priorities and needs. Music and musicians are, of course, a vital and important part of the (worshipping) life of the church; but they are not the only part. For advice about positive shapes of conversation and questions you might cover, see our additional document [HERE](#).

Whatever decisions are reached, it remains important to risk assess your situation (our RSCM templates are still available to help you) and to re-visit the arrangements on a regular basis, not least as the wider COVID circumstances continue to evolve.

The overall narrative should be taken that, just because all restrictions are lifted, it does not automatically imply that all changes to 'new normal' should happen at once, any more than reaching a de-restriction sign on a road means that one should automatically drive at the maximum speed limit, regardless of the bends in the road.

The RSCM is not itself responsible for the implementation of these guidance notes; and the spirit underpinning all your decision making should be one of reasonableness and responsibility.

Go ahead? *Think carefully about the 'performing' forces needed to offer the worship intended. You should consider decisions taking into account the wider health context in your area and the*

context of your participants, particularly if clinically vulnerable individuals are involved.

How safe does it need to be? *In thinking through your potential provision, and in completing risk assessments, you might use a working hypothesis that one or more members of your musicians may be infected with COVID. Do your mitigation measures mean that you are reasonably satisfied that the rest of your group is protected sufficiently?*

FAQs

PLEASE read the document first, but if you have any subsequent questions, you are welcome to email enquiries@rscm.com.

- 1. What about the choir: can they continue to sing?** *Yes. Singing is a mask-exempt activity, but sensible precautions around this are essential (and see also point below: mask wearing in services is now mandatory)*
Local decision making may conclude that it is sensible for a choir to be un-masked for the whole service, if singing multiple items in quick succession (reflecting government advice [HERE](#): wearing a face covering you should avoid taking it off and putting it back on a lot in quick succession to minimise potential contamination)
- 2. So can we have choir practice as usual?** *Yes.*
- 3. Can children sing?** *Yes.*
- 4. How many children (U18s) can be in the choir?** *No limits.*
- 5. How many musicians and singers can we have?**
This will be informed by your own local risk assessment of space available between singers). Good ventilation and duty of care towards singers are both essential.
- 6. Can the congregation sing?** *Yes! But congregations must wear masks for indoor services. We advise that this should include for singing, particularly being mindful that for carol services there are lots of carols to be sung, potentially with larger numbers. For support with getting your congregation singing again, see [HERE](#)*
- 7. What about concerts?** *There are slightly different rules for concerts if your audience is to exceed 500 – this guidance is for services.*
- 8. Where can I find Risk Assessment templates?** *Here are links to the RSCM website documents:*

<http://www.rscm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Risk-assessment-introduction.pdf>

<http://www.rscm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Risk-assessment-template.pdf>

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Please also refer to the RSCM's webpage for all our Covid-19 resources:

<https://www.rscm.org.uk/covid-19-resources-for-churches/>

9. **If someone is ill and potentially diagnosed with COVID, does all the choir have to isolate?** No – but this reinforces the need to try and mitigate all casual encounters whilst choir activity takes place. Any 'close contacts' will be approached by NHS Track and Trace. Wider government regulations on this still apply; regular testing of the choir might be something you could encourage. RSCM has been working with Making Music and the Association of British Choral Directors, and we commend the use of 'Well Rehearsed' app for tracking attendance data. [WellRehearsed app for rehearsals | Making Music](#)
10. **Can a choir sing at a pastoral service, then? (e.g. a wedding or funeral)** Yes.
11. **What do we need to do about music copies?** No specific restrictions
12. **Can we use choir robes?** Yes.
13. **What (additional) protection does the conductor need?** Individual circumstances will dictate this, but is a question you should work through.
14. **Can we use the choir stalls?** Yes.
15. **Do the musicians need to be a specific distance from the congregation?** No; but you should consider whether some level of distancing is still appropriate.
16. **Can we process in church?** Yes.
17. **What instruments can we use in worship?** There are no specific restrictions.
18. **Can music group singers share microphones?** There are no specific restrictions, but we would continue to recommend that you take sensible, proportionate precautions.
19. **Can an Officiant sing (at Evensong for example)?** Yes.

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**Resuming music in worship:
Conversation topics you might think about within a
discussion in your local situation**

(a non-exhaustive and optional list):



1. What will the trajectory of the next five months look like? Will there be a number of phases?
2. What do we want to prioritise in resuming first? (e.g. choir singing; congregation singing one hymn with mask on etc; or congregation resuming hymn singing and choir singing music at a separate service.)
3. What will we look to bring back differently?
4. Who needs to be brought into consultation about our plans, so that they feel 'heard'?
5. Who do we need to *inform* about our plans? How will we do that successfully?
6. How will we address concerns of particular groups? Choir? Congregation? The clinically vulnerable?

More music-specific topics (physical parameters):

1. Is there adequate ventilation?
2. Do we need to think afresh about spacing of singers and/or instrumentalists?
3. Does the director/conductor need extra mitigation measures (e.g. a screen?)
4. Is there a need to create/maintain a physical distance between congregation and musicians?

Actual music considerations, for the music leader:

1. What do you want to prioritise first – resuming old music? Learning new? Simple repertoire, or work at something more substantial?
2. How will you re-engage and re-energise your singers and musicians?
3. How many musicians should you use? Some? All? Rota?
4. How will you re-connect your congregation with singing, at the moment when they start again?

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5. What will you do if one or more members of your choir or music team is needing to self-isolate at short notice? What (musical) back-up plans might you need to prepare?

Things to remember:

- If you add hymnody/worship songs, they only add a few minutes to service length
- Most churches (though not all) are blessed with draughts and lofty ceilings – this helps you manage ventilation concerns
- If you run a choir or a worship band, you will undoubtedly have an in-built track and trace system so you will know who's coming to practice and services. This helps you manage in a Covid safe way. As stated in our FAQs, *RSCM has been working with Making Music and the Association of British Choral Directors, and we commend the use of 'Well Rehearsed' app for tracking this data.* [WellRehearsed app for rehearsals | Making Music](#)