**Singing in Church**

To be able to sing as part of worship is as old as worship itself. Like so many aspects of our lives the presence of COVID-19 has seriously impacted on what we long to be able to do. We have to balance the joy and affirmation of being able to sing with others with the risk of transmitting the virus to others in doing so. There continues to be significant debate about the accounts of “choir singing related” outbreaks around the world but there remains a theoretical risk associated with singing which appears to be greater than the risk of transmission from speaking.

The reason singing is a risk for virus transmission is that droplets of saliva can spray from someone’s mouth, and those droplets can be made out of the mucus that coats the lungs and larynx and could contain virus particles if someone is infected. What is unclear is how far those droplets may be projected when singing (as opposed to speaking) and what, if anything about the singing, might influence the extent of that spread. In addition, we are more likely to cough when we sing and strain our voices, increasing further the risk of spreading the virus.

This makes it hard to know how risky it is to allow a choir, music group or the wider congregation to sing in church and what the risk may be for those listening in an enclosed building. The least risky option is not to allow singing in places where people from more than one household gather. However, others would argue that the risk can be managed by scrupulous social distancing, excellent hand hygiene, scrupulous cleaning of all hard surfaces and individuals acting responsibly if they have symptoms or fall into a category who should self-isolate. Wearing a non-surgical, unfitted face mask does not protect individuals from inhaling viral particles. Wearing a mask whilst singing will reduce the number of viral particles shed by the singer but it is incredibly difficult to do comfortably.

Whilst there is no vaccine and COVID-19 continues to be prevalent in the community if singing, as part of a service is to allowed, then it must be assessed as an essential part of an act of worship and can only be undertaken following a scrupulous and honest risk assessment for all those taking part in that act of worship.

**Music groups**

At the moment the government guidance is clear that people from different households cannot meet in a building for any length of time even if they are socially distancing, other than as part of paid employment when they cannot work from home or to shop. So, at the moment, music groups cannot meet either in church or in each other’s homes to rehearse or record music for services.

Once members of different households are allowed to meet indoors then music groups may meet to rehearse and record music whilst maintaining appropriate social distancing, excellent hand hygiene and appropriate cleaning or instruments and the place they meet. Music groups should undertake a comprehensive risk assessment around their personal vulnerability as well as the risk associated with the instruments they play. All wind and brass instruments should not be played in shared spaces due to the risk of droplet spread. Due to the time that a music group will spend with each other in an enclosed space, without personal protective equipment, if one of the group develops symptoms all of the group will have to self-isolate and follow appropriate guidance around testing. It may be appropriate to consider a smaller music group, using those instruments with the most versatility such as a keyboard to reduce risk.

**Organs and organists**

Currently organists may go into a church building to play the organ to keep it functioning. In doing so they should follow social distancing and hand hygiene guidelines and wipe down the key board and other surfaces once they have completed their session. The maintenance of the organ may happen during a time when the church building is open for private prayer as long as the number of people in the church does not exceed the number agreed in the building’s risk assessment.

It is anticipated that there will be national guidance around the conduct of public worship including the role of choirs, music groups and organists in the near future.