

RETURN TO REHEARSAL

A PLANNING RESOURCE FOR CHORUSES

COVID-19 Risk Assessment, Mitigations and Checklist

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Table of Contents

Background	3
Risk Assessment	3
Planning Approach	4
Considerations in Developing Your Chorus COVID-19 Safe Protocols	4
Physical Rehearsal Space(s)	5
Safety and Rehearsal Protocol	6
Rehearsal Strategies	7
Equity Considerations	7
Social and Mental Health Considerations	7
Sample Structure of Chorus COVID-19 Rehearsal Checklists	7
References	8
SAMPLE ONLY - Rehearsal Venue Preparation Checklist	9
SAMPLE ONLY - Rehearsal Guidelines for Members	10
SAMPLE ONLY - Guidelines for Conducting Rehearsal Activities	11
SAMPLE ONLY - Rehearsal Venue Cleaning and Reset Checklist	12
SAMPLE ONLY - COVID-19 Safe Governance Checklist	13



Background

As COVID-19 restrictions begin to relax around the country, many of our choruses in the region are at a point where they are considering when and how they will return to face-to-face rehearsals.

There have been examples from both the USA and Europe where early in the period of the pandemic (March 2020) clusters of COVID-19 infection have occurred in groups participating in choir rehearsals. Research is ongoing into better understanding the mechanisms by which aerosol borne viral particles are spread during vocal activities such as group singing. In Australia, Gondwana Choirs have hosted two informative webinars ^{1, 2} on this topic. In the US, the Barbershop Harmony Society has sponsored a similar set of webinars which can be viewed on YouTube ³.

Local and national choral groups and associations (e.g. BHA and ANCA) have reached out to national and state-based health departments looking for *specific* advice on the guidelines for choirs to meet face to face. At this time, the advice received is of a generic nature and reflects the social distancing and group gathering guidelines for all indoor activities and does not take into account the identified specific risks associated with singing activities.

Each chorus' management team/board will be discussing their potential return to rehearsals at some stage in the near future. When you eventually start to work towards returning to in-person rehearsals, the risks to members and the management of these risks must be carefully considered.

Risk Assessment

Every chorus has its own set of unique circumstances, including chorus size, geographical location, rehearsal venue characteristics, member demographics, and underlying health conditions. Analysing these factors and undertaking a detailed risk assessment will enable chorus leaders to develop a plan for how future rehearsals may be managed.

There are many tools available to assist with Risk Assessment and Mitigations.

The World Health Organisation has a specific tool designed for risk assessment of group gatherings, again it is not singing specific, but there is a version of the tool for religious gatherings, whose characteristics closely mimic those of singing activities, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/how-to-use-who-risk-assessment-and-mitigation-checklist-for-mass-gatherings-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

Sample risk assessments for workplaces are also available from the Safe Work Australia Website, however at this point in time there is no specific advice relating to singing, musicians, or performance-based activities. <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces>.



Planning Approach

In order to resume physical rehearsals, it is suggested that a clear set of protocols related to your chorus' unique risks and the local health environment are developed and maintained.

In developing your chorus COVID-19 Safe protocols it is imperative that your chorus stays up to date with the latest advice, restrictions, and guidelines relevant to your local jurisdiction. This advice varies from state to state and changes with time, the latest advice can be assessed using these links.

National <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

NSW <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19>

VICTORIA <https://www.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

QUEENSLAND <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19>

SOUTH AUSTRALIA <https://www.covid-19.sa.gov.au/>

WESTERN AUSTRALIA <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/covid-19-coronavirus>

TASMANIA <https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/>

ACT <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/>

Industry specific guidance for workplaces is also available from the Safe Work Australia Website, however at this point in time there is no specific advice relating to singing, musicians, or performance-based activities. <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces>.

A comprehensive set of considerations for developing your chorus protocols has been extracted from the American Choral Directors Association COVID-19 Working Group Report.⁴

Considerations in Developing Your Chorus COVID-19 Safe Protocols

- Consider and think deeply about the culture and population of the ensemble. What might be acceptable in an ensemble of members with predominantly low-risk health considerations might not be acceptable for individuals at higher risk, or members living with higher risk individuals.
- Determine and clearly communicate attendance/membership requirements.
 - Will face-to-face rehearsals be mandatory or voluntary?
 - What attendance rules will apply for mandatory rehearsals?
 - Is there a creative, alternative way to include members who are uncomfortable with face to-face rehearsals due to risk factors?
 - Consider the group dynamic between those who are present in face-to-face rehearsals vs those who do not attend.



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- Consider the impact on performance when members have had varying degrees of face-to-face rehearsal time (this may affect programming).
 - For ensembles requiring stricter attendance standards, consider how this will be communicated and the reasons for the stricter standards.
 - Consider assembling a focus group of members for feedback on the protocol prior to disseminating it to the group.
 - Clearly communicate the protocol to the members as early as possible.
 - Emphasise that the entire group is dependent on the strict adherence of each individual to the health guidelines.
 - Plan for mitigation should an ensemble member test positive for COVID-19. Determine how and to whom this information will be communicated.
 - Plan for a process for regular review of protocol in response to current conditions in your local jurisdiction on the ground and as circumstances change—at minimum, once a month.
 - Consider your approach for managing visitors and/or prospective members participation in rehearsals.

Physical Rehearsal Space(s)

- Ensure that the available space accommodates the number of members in your chorus within the current recommended distancing guidelines for your local jurisdiction.
- Consider rehearsing outdoors
- Consult with the owner/organisation who controls the rehearsal space and coordinate your COVID-19 Safe Planning protocols with them. This includes members offering their homes as spaces for small group rehearsals.
 - Determine who cleans and prepares the space for rehearsal and between rehearsals.
 - Clearly specify what cleaning and sanitising encompasses.
 - Review ventilation and airflow in the rehearsal space and consider any changes that might need to be made.
- Determine lines of communication between the owner/organisation who controls the space and the chorus if an individual in either entity should test positive for COVID-19 to enable appropriate contact tracing.
- Undertake a site visit where possible to review the rehearsal space as you work to develop your protocols.
- Consider the time needed to sanitise the space between rehearsals if planning back-to-back rehearsals.
- Determine distancing for set up by consulting the current recommendations of state health departments.
- Consider rehearsing without risers or chairs, standing only, with chairs provided only for those in need to minimise the number of surfaces requiring sanitisation.
- Anticipate needs of members with disabilities (wheelchairs, etc.).
- Determine restroom usage and protocol if restroom usage is permitted.
- Provide access to handwashing or hand sanitising upon entry to the rehearsal venue.
- Plan for pre- and post-rehearsal traffic flow:



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- Anticipate the amount of time needed to allow for physical distancing when entering and exiting, based on the access to the rehearsal space.
 - Consider one way in/out through different entrances to the rehearsal space or building, if possible.
 - If one way in/out is not possible, consider staggering report times with more time between back-to-back rehearsals.

Safety and Rehearsal Protocol

- Clearly communicate protocols to members well in advance of the rehearsal.
- Suggest members download and activate the COVID Safe application.
- Keep rehearsal times shorter if practical to do so.
- Establish early starting times to allow for the extra time needed for cleaning and set up protocols
- Put up signage to manage traffic paths, and for any other reminders required.
- Have a volunteer outside the rehearsal space greeting members, reminding them of protocols, and assisting with traffic flow into the rehearsal space.
- No borrowed music if members forget their music.
- No sharing of music, food, pencils, water bottles or other supplies in rehearsal.
- Delineate acceptable personal space for each member, using chairs, tape on the floor or similar markers.
- Members should minimise the number of personal items brought to the rehearsal and keep them within their own personal space at rehearsals, rather than placing them in a communal area.
- Encourage members to monitor their temperature prior to attendance (a temperature greater than 37.5 C is indicative of a fever) and advise if anomalies are present
 - Care should be taken with any personal health information.
 - Choruses should not keep written records of any members personal health information.
 - Communicate concerns privately.
- Follow recommendations on acceptable group sizes from local health authorities, which may require rehearsing in sections or smaller groups.
- Determine safe distancing for standing/sitting arrangements.
- Attendance:
 - Consider modifying attendance expectations.
 - If rehearsing in subgroups of the ensemble, group assignments should be static to aid in contact tracing – ideally no changes to personnel within a group, rehearsal to rehearsal.
 - Maintain meticulous attendance records for contact tracing.
 - Move to non-paper-based tracking of attendance if possible, to avoid another potential transmission path at rehearsals.
- Determine specific protocols and set up to ensure the health and well-being of the chorus director.
- Determine and communicate protocols for break times in rehearsal.
- Communicate clearly that individuals are participating in rehearsals at their own risk.
- Plan for procedures for members unable to attend face-to-face rehearsals:
 - Members exhibiting any form of illness should stay home.



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- Consider providing remote listening/observing of the rehearsal for those unable to attend via Zoom or another online platform.
 - Consider video/audio recording rehearsals and making them available for all members online.
 - Determine a protocol for return to rehearsal following illness, particularly if the member has tested positive for COVID-19.

Rehearsal Strategies

- Consider rehearsing with small groups consisting of different voice parts to provide the possibility of each group representing the whole vocal product.
- Consider meeting by voice parts.
- Consider a roster of face to face and virtual rehearsals to limit numbers.

Equity Considerations

- Consider how to make rehearsals accessible to members who are reliant on public transportation.
- Anticipate physical needs of those with mobility or non-COVID health issues.

Social and Mental Health Considerations

- Plan for non-contact social/team building activities.
- Anticipate that everyone's risk tolerance will be different. Care should be taken to ensure that those with lower risk-tolerance are not made to feel inferior.
 - Consider how to be inclusive of those with lower risk-tolerance or those who have health considerations that prevent them from participating in face-to-face rehearsals, not just musically, but in the community of the chorus.
 - Consider emphasizing a "no guilt" policy/attitude for individuals with low risk-tolerance.
 - When comfort level is unclear, err on the side of caution.
 - Balance attendance requirements necessary to achieve a desired performance level with the social/emotional needs of members with low risk tolerance.

Sample Structure of Chorus COVID-19 Rehearsal Checklists

Depending on your venue and local jurisdiction requirements, plans to be developed should potentially include:

- Rehearsal Venue Preparation Checklist – configuring the room and facilities prior to member arrival, including setting up access paths, technology, pre-cleaning.
- Rehearsal Guidelines for Members – setting out all procedures and protocols for members to follow.
- Guidelines for Rehearsal Activities – for chorus directors and supervising members describing acceptable venue configuration, activities, and other procedures.
- Rehearsal Venue Cleaning and Reset Checklist – for team members tasked with cleaning and resetting the venue after the close of rehearsal.
- Internal Governance Protocols – for chorus management teams.



References

1. <https://www.gondwana.org.au/covid-19-the-future-of-choral-singing-in-australia/>
2. <https://www.gondwana.org.au/back-to-choir/>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcwXdNVvSNbgNBR69X-nN1B7Iof6yx-2m>
4. <https://acda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ACDA-COVID-19-Committee-Report.pdf>



SAMPLE ONLY - Rehearsal Venue Preparation Checklist

ITEM	COMPLETE
Unlock venue	
Open entry and exit points	
Open windows and doors providing ventilation	
Place signage to manage traffic flows	
Set up hand sanitisation stations near entry point	
Check soap is available in bathroom facilities	
Sanitise commonly touched surfaces (if pre-cleaning has not been undertaken by venue owner), including door handles, taps, light and power switches, chairs	
Mark out personal spacing (chairs or floor markers)	
Station a team member to direct foot traffic into the venue and remind members of protocols on arrival	
Check attendance on arrival (if required)	



SAMPLE ONLY - Rehearsal Guidelines for Members

ATTENDANCE

- If you feel uneasy about attendance at rehearsals for any reason, please do not feel any pressure to attend, and use the Zoom or Facebook Live option to catch up
- Attendance is at your own risk, and you should consider your personal health and family circumstances in assessing your own risks
- You should indicate your attendance plan in the electronic attendance log no later than 2 hours prior to rehearsal start time
- Please **DO NOT** attend rehearsal if you have any of the following signs or symptoms: fever (above 37.5C), shortness of breath, cough, sore throat, runny nose, loss of taste or smell
- If you have been tested for COVID-19 and are awaiting test results, are under quarantine for COVID-19, have travelled interstate or overseas in the past 14 days, or have been in contact with someone who meets these criteria, please **DO NOT** attend

WHAT TO BRING

- Please bring minimal items with you to rehearsal, just what you need
- Do not share any personal items with other chorus members (pencils, erasers, water bottles, music)
- If you forget your music you **WILL NOT** be issued with spare copies at rehearsal

REHEARSAL ACTIVITY

- Please do not form groups as you enter and leave the venue, spread yourselves out and enter singly
- Sanitise your hands on entry and exit and after trips to the bathroom
- Keep to allocated/indicated personal spaces once inside the rehearsal room, keep your bag/gear with you
- No touching, kissing, or hugging – elbow bumps are allowed!
- Keep social distancing guidelines during breaks or when having conversations
- Please leave the venue quickly and singly at the close of rehearsal using the indicated Exit point

HEALTH MANAGEMENT

- We suggest (but do not require) that members with SMART phones download the COVID Safe application from the [Australian Government Dept of Health COVID Safe Website](#)
- Please advise your Section Leader if at any point in time you are diagnosed with COVID-19 infection so that we may manage communication with other chorus members as necessary (we will endeavor at all times to respect your privacy and personal information)



SAMPLE ONLY - Guidelines for Conducting Rehearsal Activities

SPACING

- Keep members physically anchored in their own personal space as much as practical.
- If activities require movement, return members to their own space and belongings at the end of activity.

BREAKS

- Offer staggered breaks to sections of the chorus at a time, rather than everyone at the same time.
- Encourage quick turnaround on breaks, minimal chat.

VENTILATION

- Keep the room ventilated as much as practical given limitations of ambient temperature and member comfort.



SAMPLE ONLY - Rehearsal Venue Cleaning and Reset Checklist

ITEM	COMPLETE
Station a team member to direct foot traffic to Exit the venue and remind members not to congregate in groups on departure.	
Sanitise commonly touched surfaces (if post-cleaning will not be undertaken by the venue owner). Door handles, taps, light and power switches, chairs.	
Remove signage.	
Pack up hand sanitisation stations.	
Close windows and doors, shut down heating and cooling.	
Close entry and exit points.	
Lock venue.	



SAMPLE ONLY - COVID-19 Safe Governance Checklist

ITEM	COMPLETE
Members have been engaged and informed in developing chorus rehearsal protocols especially regarding attendance requirements, risk and communicating any health concerns.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rehearsal venue owners / managers have been consulted and clear responsibilities defined with respect to cleaning, sanitising and communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rehearsal Venue checklists have been developed, responsibility to execute them is clear, and they are used at every rehearsal.	<input type="checkbox"/>
A communication mechanism is established should a member test positive.	<input type="checkbox"/>
A return to chorus process is defined for members who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 infection but have recovered.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop a plan for circumstances where COVID-19 restrictions are escalated again, and physical rehearsals must not proceed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Review of chorus COVID -19 protocols is a regular agenda item at monthly Management team/board meetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keep up to date with the latest requirements relevant to your local health authorities	<input type="checkbox"/>