

Key Messages from the COVID-19 sub-group advice on Music

Following the return to full-time schooling in Scotland in August 2020, it has become apparent that, specific advice on the teaching of music in schools would be a helpful addition to the advice set out in the Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance on preparing for the start of the new school term in August 2020 document.

This guidelines document has been prepared by Education Scotland based on the scientific advice provided by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues and with input from key stakeholders.

While acknowledging the importance of music education in terms of developing skills and supporting health and wellbeing, and the negative impact of limiting music in schools, the guidelines here follows a precautionary approach based on the latest scientific advice with the aim of minimising the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and allowing schools to remain open.

Local authorities and schools should exercise their judgement when implementing this guidelines, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children, young people and staff taking into account local circumstances.

The guidelines will be kept under review and updated when necessary. Local authorities and schools will also need to be able to adapt to local issues, e.g. outbreaks or local increases in cases of COVID-19, and follow any locally-determined advice and guidance.

This advice for school-age children and young people is reviewed regularly and can change as evidence is published and more about the virus is understood. Separate guidance for Early Years and Childcare practitioners is available on the Scottish Government website.

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1. Overview and purpose

This document has been prepared by Education Scotland based on advice from the Scottish Government Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children’s Issues, and with input from key stakeholders. While recognising the importance of music education, in developing important skills, and the negative impact of limiting music-making in schools, these guidelines follow a precautionary approach. The advice has the sole aim of minimising the risk of transmission of COVID -19.

The reopening of schools is a major and significant step. It is important to enable the actions required to prevent transmission of the virus to become established, and monitoring needs to be undertaken for a further period of time before resuming activities which carry such an increased risk. There should be an incremental approach to the introduction of activities and further consideration should take place later in the school year when there will be greater understanding about the virus and viral transmission.

There is an increased risk of transmission of COVID -19 during instrumental and class music lessons (particularly when singing and playing wind instruments). This is because of the respiratory aerosols which are exhaled during these activities and the close proximity of participants. The wearing of face coverings is usually not possible for these activities.

There is also a hierarchy of risk in these activities, for example, outdoors is safer than indoors. Activities undertaken at low volume or those that have lower respiratory exertion are safer than aerosol-generating activities. Individuals or small numbers performing are safer than large groups performing. Activities involving no sharing of equipment is safer than those where learners do share (or where equipment cannot be thoroughly cleaned between uses). Activities which can be done at a distance (or virtually) are safer than those in close proximity. Shorter duration activities carry a lower risk than longer duration activities.

There is a lack of evidence about the role and relative risk of singing, and playing musical instruments, in the transmission of COVID-19. There are however a series of features which will reduce any risk associated with these activities. Adopting a precautionary approach, the sub-group’s advice is that music activities should take place only in situations where they comply with the low risk criteria set out below.

Music education activities bring many benefits to children and young people, including for health and wellbeing; social, physical and cognitive development; creativity, communication, team work, and discipline. These activities are also important routes to equity and inclusion, and are the basis of further education and employment for many. For all these reasons, it is important to find safe ways of

undertaking some form of these activities wherever possible, until they can recommence safely in full.

2. Suggested mitigations recommended for Music

There is limited evidence about the effects of coronavirus transmission through participation in music activities. At the time of writing, members of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) are considering these issues, and advice is anticipated shortly. The advice that follows here will be reviewed following clarification of the evidence from SAGE. Meantime, it is our advice that young people should not engage in singing, or playing wind and brass instruments with other people, given these activities pose a potentially higher risk of transmission. This does not mean that these activities cannot take place at all. Creative approaches out with school should be taken to provide these lessons. (An exception to this guidance is now available for all brass, woodwind and singers preparing for assessments in the senior phase. See below for further details).

Although singing, brass and woodwind and group lessons cannot take place regularly with everyone physically in the same room together, technology can facilitate collective participation. For example, singing, music lessons, and choir practice, can take place virtually; young people might record themselves performing and provide the recordings to their teacher. For those young people who have chosen to undertake an SQA qualification in music, it may be necessary to record a virtual portfolio.

The risk for staff, children and young people is also reduced if lessons take place outdoors or under a gazebo (with opened sides or equivalent). Appropriate physical distancing should be in place where possible. There should be no sharing of musical instruments between learners during class, and careful consideration should be given to the cleaning of instruments and other equipment such as music stands between classes. People should wash their hands before and after touching such shared equipment.

For music, there is a sliding-scale of risk associated with different activities. Only when there is a combination of low-risk factors identified and a clear risk assessment completed with mitigations in place, should the activity go ahead. Large group activities and those where no distancing can take place between adults or between adults and pupils, should not be re-introduced meantime. Individual lessons where two metres physical distancing can be applied, the environment is well ventilated and equipment is not shared, carry low risk. Virtual lessons, rehearsals and performances using digital forms of communication, carry even less risk. Choirs, orchestras and ensemble performances should not recommence at this point. In addition, risk is reduced when activities take place for a shorter period of time, and when performers (or pupil-teacher) are orientated in order that they are not face-to-face.

Low risk	High risk
Outdoors or virtual activities (e.g. recorded performances, use of awnings/gazebos).	Indoor activities in enclosed spaces (e.g. unventilated classrooms, studios).
Normal breathing and volume of speech (e.g. piano playing,)	Higher volume or aerosol-generating activities (e.g. singing, wind/brass instruments).
Individual or small numbers involved with social distancing in place. (e.g. solo performance, string quartet).	Large group (e.g. choir or orchestra)
Any equipment is used only by one person (e.g. pupil and teacher have their own personal instruments).	Equipment is shared (e.g. keyboards, shared percussion, shared props). Risk is lessened if equipment can be fully cleaned between each use.
Distancing possible between all participants.	Physical distancing not possible.

3. Current additional music subject specific advice

- A clear risk assessment should be in place. This needs to address the risks of COVID-19, using the scientific guidance provided above to inform your decisions and control measures. You will need to take account of the individual needs of those with additional support needs. Your risk assessment should identify clearly all measures in place to control the risks in your music learning environment. Your music risk assessment will support you to consider whether you have done everything necessary to promote safe learning and teaching during the pandemic. Completed music instrumental risk assessments should be kept under review as circumstances and advice is updated.
- Staff should ensure that all indoor spaces being used are well ventilated. There may be a need to use additional alternative spaces. These could include, for example, assembly halls, games halls, dining facilities and other general purpose areas around the school, to deliver lessons that comply with the above guidelines. Music staff should liaise with senior leaders in their school where this is required.
- Instrumental music staff can continue to offer young people instrumental tuition using the best on-line video-conferencing technology available and taking full account of child protection and safeguarding systems in place.
- Hand sanitisers and other musical instrument-appropriate cleaning materials should be available for use in every music classroom and practice room.
- Arrangements should be put in place to ensure that all necessary equipment is cleaned prior to and after use by teachers and learners. Cleaning strategies should include regular cleaning and disinfection of musical instruments and all other music devices frequently touched. In addition there should be regular

cleaning of hard surfaces, chairs, doors, handles, shared technology, light switches, keyboards, headphones, and any other relevant music or music technology classroom equipment. When learners are using school music headphones, the entire headphone including any headband and adaptor should be cleaned before and after use.

- The risk in music environments is reduced when activities take place for a shorter period of time and performers are oriented so they are not sitting face to face. Staff in music classrooms should continue to avoid children and young people rehearsing or performing face-to-face wherever possible. Before playing keyboards, pianos, glockenspiels, ukuleles and other classroom instruments, all players should sanitise their hands. Piano keys, drumsticks etc. should be disinfected with cleaning cloths before and after being played.
- Instrumental timetables should be reviewed for all children and young people who receive a lesson in school, to reduce pupil movement where possible.
- Staff should mark out areas clearly to help people maintain social distance where possible, especially in practice rooms.
- Individual sheet and/or digital music scores should be provided for all learners. Music sheets should be provided early in the term to ensure learners, especially those who will be preparing for SQA or other music examinations, can continue to learn at pace if they were unable to attend school at any point during this session.
- To support the teaching of individual music compositions, web cams for example, can be connected to interactive boards or visualisers to enable teachers to provide helpful demonstrations and comment.
- Performances should continue to be recorded as part of normal learning and as part of a virtual portfolio This can provide support for the development of music skills and provide latest and best evidence of the level achieved by a learner. Brass, woodwind and singing candidates have now been given permission by SQA to choose to record assessment performances at home during COVID-19 restrictions. Where learners choose to do this, teachers should ensure that over the next term they enable appropriate school equipment such as tablet computers or hand held digital devices to be borrowed in order to fulfil this requirement. Any music department experiencing challenges in completing this requirement, should work with their school senior leaders, to ensure equipment is made available.
- The sharing of classroom instruments such as smaller percussion instruments should only be done with careful consideration. It may be necessary to allocate instruments to specific students. All percussion instruments should be sanitised before and after use.
- These guidelines should be shared with all music practitioners and partners who work with children and young people in your establishments and school communities. We encourage all private music teachers and all other music

partners including external and other private providers who work with children and young people within schools to read and follow the guidelines.

Preparation for assessment

While the advice from the Scottish Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues suggests that young people should not engage in singing, or playing wind and brass instruments with other people, it is acknowledged that this presents a particular challenge for young people preparing for qualifications. Further scientific and clinical advice has been provided to Scottish Government and as a result a small update in the present guidance has been made as advised below.

- One-to-one lessons and practice sessions can go ahead for pupils preparing for assessments in brass, wind, piping and singing. These sessions should be kept to the minimum required (both in length and frequency) to prepare adequately for assessment. Learners will have different requirements and teachers should apply their judgement in deciding what is necessary.
- The recording of brass, wind, piping and singing by individual learners for assessment purposes can also take place in school with a teacher present.
- One-to-one lessons, practice sessions and recording should only go ahead subject to the completion of a very robust local risk assessment by practitioners, with the agreement of senior school leaders.
- These risk assessments should include the following mitigations:
 - Any activity should take place in a large, well-ventilated room.
 - There should be a clear defined space of 2 metres or more between the learner and their teacher.
 - Where possible a clear screen should be positioned between the learner and their teacher.
 - The teacher should wear a mask.
 - The learner should, where appropriate, wear a mask whenever they are not performing.
 - The room must be sanitised carefully at the end of each performance.
 - There should be a delay between candidates using the room to allow aerosol particles to dissipate.

4. Further Guidance

Separate exemplification on the emerging practice from music and music technology practitioners is available on the Education Scotland National Improvement Hub:

[Music and music technology | Emerging practice | COVID-19 education recovery | National Improvement Hub](#)

Individuals and organisations working with children and young people out with schools should consider the relevant Scottish Government guidance available for them through the links below.

Separate guidance for Early Years and Childcare practitioners is available on the Scottish Government website: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): early learning and childcare \(ELC\) services - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Where children are being taught privately, the Coronavirus (COVID-19): organised activities for children provisional guidance applies :

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-organised-activities-for-children/>

Safer workplaces guidance can be found on the Scottish Government's returning to work safely webpage: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-returning-to-work/pages/employers/>

Additional information is available at the links below:

- The Coronavirus (COVID -19) guidance for sport and leisure:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-sport-and-leisure-facilities/>
- The Coronavirus (COVID-19): general guidance for safer workplaces:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-general-guidance-for-safer-workplaces/>;
- The Coronavirus (COVID-19): small and micro businesses guidance:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-small-and-micro-businesses-guidance/>;
- The Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for the performing arts and venues sector:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-performing-arts-and-venues-sector/>;

All sets of guidance will be updated in response to changing circumstances and the latest scientific advice. Partner providers are advised to check the guidance regularly for updates.