

Music Unlocked

Guidance for Providers

This guidance is intended to inform music services and other music education providers in planning and risk assessing musical activity in schools. It is a partner document to our [Guidance for School Leaders on Musical Learning and COVID-19](#).

In formulating this guidance, we have reviewed academic studies and we have consulted our members, national bodies and others. The science of Covid-19 is in its earliest infancy and new discoveries are being made all the time. Music Mark will revisit and update this guidance from time to time in the light of the latest scientific understanding.

Whilst every effort has been undertaken to verify the information used to write this document and to relate that specifically to musical learning for children and young people in and out of school, Music Mark cannot be held accountable for any advice given which subsequently is proven to be inaccurate.

This guide presupposes that schools and providers are already complying with:

- social distancing;
- improved hand hygiene;
- enhanced cleaning of school buildings and other settings;
- normal considerations regarding noise levels;
- maintaining vocal health, i.e. singing safely;
- lifting (manual handling) and posture.

Musical learning reinvented

Since schools closed on 20th March 2020, music services and other music education providers have learnt to deliver many of their tuition and support services online. While nearly all cultural organisations have shared content with their audiences, the music education sector has become a leader in providing meaningful, two-way engagement with schools, students and parents.

The longer that the lockdown has continued, the more sophisticated music education providers' online delivery and resources have become. A very small number of services have found ways for groups of musicians to make music simultaneously online in a limited way but the holy grail of running full rehearsals and performances from multiple locations is still elusive. Nevertheless, many services have found innovative ways to continue supporting whole class and group learning. Streamed singing assemblies, virtual choirs and ensembles, virtual big sings and even whole virtual festivals are springing up countrywide.

Nobody thinks virtual is best. Nobody sees online as the only way that music education providers will deliver when schools fully reopen, but it will be a permanent feature of most offers going forward. Whatever strains schools have been under and will return under, once full classes are back in, the old

routines are likely to largely fall back into place: however music education provision will be considerably different and ever better for what has happened.

Business as unusual for now

Few music education providers are expecting to get back into schools before September 2020; many are preparing to be unable to deliver face-to-face provision in schools before November or even January 2021. Some in the education world have stated that they do not expect schools to be fully back to normal before September 2021. The cultural sector expects to feel the repercussions for perhaps two and a half years and all that is without reckoning for a second wave of COVID-19 or the emergence of a completely new infection.

Making music safely in school

This section reflects the current state of COVID-19 research as it relates to making music in schools. Each music education service/provider will need to make their own risk assessments, potentially for each setting in which they work. This information will provide some scientific basis, but risk assessments will need to take into account specific local context and be kept under review.

This section contains:

- Information about the current scientific understanding of the new health risks of music-making and how you can make music as safely as possible;
- Links to reliable guidance on cleaning instruments;
- Guidance in managing risks faced by peripatetic tutors visiting schools and a recommended code of practice.

Note that this information only relates to the additional risks of COVID-19. Risks that you would previously have controlled for still exist and still need to be considered. The advice in this document also presupposes general guidelines on frequent hand washing, more rigorous cleaning and normal social distancing are being followed.

The science and what to do about it

How people catch COVID-19

COVID-19 is transmitted through water droplets which contain the virus. Approximately 1,000 virus particles are needed to start an infection. A sneeze can release 200 million particles, albeit a good proportion of these will not be viable. There are thought to be two routes to infection (vectors) and both are significant in schools:

- Airborne water droplets (aerosol transmission);
- Contact with contaminated surfaces (fomite transmission).

Initially, it was inferred from observations and data that children were not as easily infected as adults but more recent testing suggests that infection rates in children are only slightly lower (7.4% compared to 7.9%). At the time of writing, there is very little evidence of transmission from children to adults.

COVID-19 has a relatively long incubation period, with 97.5% of people showing symptoms by day 12. It is contagious before symptoms show, although incubation varies from person to person and it is unclear when it becomes contagious. Inevitably, in countries where schools have already re-opened, there have been new cases.

It is thought that a proportion of children and working age adults who contract COVID-19 are either asymptomatic or experience only mild symptoms. Deaths among children and working age people are rarer, although they increase from about age 45. Around 90% of people who have died already had serious underlying health conditions.

It is important to understand that you cannot completely eliminate the risks of COVID-19 transmission for anyone but there are reasonable measures that can be taken.

Singing and choirs

For most singing activity, including class work and assemblies, normal social distancing will suffice. Whilst singing releases potentially hazardous bioaerosols in proportion to volume: the louder the singing, the more aerosols are released (this is also the case when talking loudly or breathing more heavily), measurements taken with university-level students and professionals suggest that there is minimal air movement much over 0.5m from a singer.

There have been reports of choirs falling ill *en masse* but it is worth stating that these occurred before social distancing and entailed several hours of singing in close company. Assemblies, singing lessons and even lunchtime choirs do not last anything like as long. A well-ventilated room, large enough to maintain the usual 2m social distancing guideline, will usually suffice. Note that the area of the room is critical here: a higher ceiling does not mean singers are safe to stand closer together.

Consider singing outdoors if you can. The risk of airborne transmission is thought to be significantly lower in the open air but be aware of wind direction for both the singers and the leader.

There are no safe face coverings for singing: all fabric masks leak air and bioaerosols around the sides and bottom.

The person leading the singing and the accompanist, if any, should be 3-5m from the front row as they will of course be facing the singers. They may want to consider a plexiglass screen.

Each singer should have their own music and should ideally keep it between rehearsals. If words or music are projected, that is ideal.

Instrumental ensembles

For most ensembles including class work, normal social distancing will suffice. Measurements of air turbulence by the Freiburg Institute for Musicians' Medicine suggest that air is not disturbed beyond the following distances:

Flutes	1.5m in front of the player 0.8m from the end of the flute
Other woodwind except saxes	1.5m
Brass and saxophones	2m from the bell

For most woodwind instruments therefore, normal social distancing of 2m will suffice. Note however that air blown across flute mouthpieces is particularly laden with aerosols and 2m should be regarded as a minimum. For safety, brass and saxophones should be given more space¹, perhaps 3m. Bass clarinets should be treated similarly, owing to their upward-facing bell. Plexiglass screens would provide additional protection to players in front of them.

It is worth pointing out that the Freiburg study was with university level and professional musicians. School age players will not have the lung capacity or strength in their diaphragms to project air as far.

Most woodwind instruments point downwards, so bioaerosols will largely fall to the floor. Brass instruments expel air either forwards or upwards: again, larger aerosols will fall under gravity but those below ten microns will remain airborne. Good ventilation, ideally overhead extraction, will help to disperse and remove these.

A report for the German Orchestral Association recommends stretching fabric over the bells of instruments to filter aerosols from the airstream. Research into fabric for face masks shows that cotton with a high thread count combined with a layer of silk is fairly effective.

Players should be discouraged from lifting their bells high, as contaminated water in the instrument can run back into the player's mouth.

Water keys should not be vented directly onto the floor. Two American studies cultured a surprising variety of bacteria from both woodwind and brass instruments². Newspaper or paper towels should be provided to soak up water (in Norway, anti-bacterial paper is recommended) and players should clear up their own.

Conductors should stand 3-5m beyond the front row of wind or brass and may wish to consider a plexiglass screen or similar. For strings and orchestras, 2m will suffice.

Social distancing means that each player (including strings) will require their own music stand. Ideally, each player should keep their own music. Photocopies of most music can be made under the Schools' Printed Music Licence and the Music Service Printed Music Licence but note that hub partners and commissioned organisations will not be covered by these.

Peripatetic instrumental and vocal lessons

As far as possible, individual and small group lessons should be held in rooms that can be ventilated well. The 2m distance (preferably more for brass, flute and saxophone) must be maintained and groups may have to be split up.

If piano tutors cannot see students' hands and maintain a 2m distance, they may need to ask the school to rearrange the room but they should not move pianos or other furniture on their own initiative. For the tutor

¹ Views vary widely on distancing for brass. Some point out that air from brass instruments moves quite slowly and from larger instruments, e.g. euphonium, barely at all. Others suggest allowing even as much as 12m.

² Smaller brass instruments and all woodwind instruments harboured oral bacteria. Larger brass instruments were found to harbour fewer oral bacteria but "all [brass] instruments have *Alcaligenes faecalis*." (Mobley & Bridges, Sinton and Corpus Christi TX, 2015). This strain was also found in one clarinet.

to demonstrate, the student will need to move 2m away from the piano. Wiping keys before and after each change of player is recommended.

Woodwind and brass tutors should insist on proper cleaning and drying of instruments at the end of lessons but should not allow students to blow or tip water out of instruments in the teaching room. Newspaper or paper towels (or anti-bacterial paper) should be provided for venting of water keys and players should remove and dispose of their own at the end of the lesson.

Students come and go but tutors are often in the teaching room for extended periods. Their exposure to multiple people and to the same air possibly for some hours puts them at greater risk. A plexiglass screen may help and they may wish to consider a mask (albeit singers, woodwind and brass players will have to remove it to demonstrate). It may also be sensible to timetable additional breaks to ventilate rooms periodically.

It should hardly need saying that nobody should ever play anyone else's mouth-blown instrument.

Cleaning instruments

All instruments present a risk of contact transmission. This is similar to the risk of transmission via door handles, handrails etc around the school. Instruments that are only used by one person should be cleaned as usual but with additional care. If instruments are used by more than one person (e.g. classroom percussion), or taken in and reallocated (e.g. at the end of a whole-class programme or hire period), meticulous cleaning is called for.

This advice may be shared with schools and contextualised as needed. Some processes are not intended to be taught to or carried out by pupils. Not all will be practical or even desirable every time an instrument is played.

The guidance is written with normal school and student instruments in mind. It is not intended for higher quality or antique instruments.

COVID-19 virus particles are believed to survive for two to five days on hard surfaces³. Disinfectant wipes and/or sprays are effective but bear in mind that most instruments contain multiple materials. Some disinfectant products will damage the pads of woodwind instruments and varnished or polished finishes.

Hot, soapy water is just as effective as disinfectant wipes and instruments or parts of instruments made **entirely** from plastic may be submersed. The same applies to brass instruments but take the valves out first (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4T8XlsDfyA>) and set them aside. Recorders can even be dishwashed in the top rack.

Do not immerse or soak woodwind instruments with cork joints or with keywork as it may damage pads: this includes flute headjoints, as it will damage the headcork.

³ Copper-zinc alloys (i.e. brass) have good viricidal properties and can kill COVID-19 in four hours but lacquers may interfere with this process. In any case, student instruments are often made of other alloys for reasons of economy and weight, and these may be less effective than brass. Silver needs a wet environment for its antimicrobial properties to work, so silver-plated instrument bodies and keywork still need cleaning.

After playing, woodwind instruments should at minimum be dried in and out with swabs or pull-throughs to limit microbial growth. Fully drying even small brass instruments is not practical but it is extremely important to clean the mouthpiece using an appropriately sized mouthpiece brush, to ensure that all dirt and debris are removed.

Plastic piano and electronic keyboards can be sanitised with disinfectant wipes (unplug electronic equipment first). Do not spray them as residues may harm key mechanisms. It is a good idea to dry keys off afterwards. Ivory keys will be damaged by most disinfectant products. Clean them with a cloth dipped in soapy water and rung out; leave the residue on for thirty seconds and wipe with a dry cloth.

Handles and straps of percussion instruments and beaters should be wiped similarly.

For wooden instruments, follow manufacturers' instructions or test your cleaning product on an inconspicuous surface. You may want to wipe the chinrests of violins or violas but it probably is not necessary (pure sweat is not thought to carry viruses). The neck and fingerboard and the lower end of the bow of all bowed strings may also be wiped.

Knobs, buttons, sliders etc on ICT equipment, amplifiers, CD/MP3 players and so forth should be wiped with antiseptic wipes. Do not use sprays or soaked cloths, to avoid liquids getting inside equipment. Always unplug from the mains before cleaning.

After five days of not being played, normal cleaning of any equipment will suffice.

Advice on cleaning instruments

More advice on cleaning different instruments is available from this American website: <https://www.nfhs.org/media/3812235/covid-19-instrument-cleaning-guidelines.pdf>

In the UK, the Music Industries Association is gathering relevant information on its website: <https://www.mia.org.uk/covid-19/>.

Sharing instruments

Good hand hygiene and wiping handling surfaces when changing players controls risks for most keyboard, percussion and string instruments.

Sharing mouth-blown instruments is **not considered safe**. Risks may be mitigated if the following points can be fully and consistently applied **every** time:

- every brass and woodwind pupil should have their own mouthpiece⁴;
- reeds must **never** be shared;
- mouthpieces and upper tubing, crooks or headjoints must be thoroughly washed before and after playing and dried before putting back in the case.

⁴ Schools with Pbone instruments can request extra free mouthpieces from [Pbone](#) so that every student can have their own.

However Music Mark does not recommend these measures and we repeat for clarity that sharing mouth-blown instruments is **not considered safe**. Tutors should also impress on students that they should not share instruments even with family members.

If practical music making really is not safe

There will be perfectly sound reasons why playing or singing is not safe in particular schools and special circumstances. One school consulted for these guides is planning to change emphasis to music appreciation and music theory until they are able to restart practical classroom music. You can point schools to a plethora of online resources and courses to enliven this learning including resources collated by Music Mark [here](#).

Considerations for music services and other music education providers working with schools

Music Mark's [guidance to schools](#) lays out a number of considerations schools should consider as they look to welcome visiting teachers back into their buildings. Music education providers may wish to refer to this guidance in agreeing protocols with their schools. However, in addition to that guidance and the following suggested code of practice, it is more important than ever to be aware of and respect each school's individual arrangements and risk assessment for safeguarding pupils and visitors.

A recommended code of practice for peripatetic tutors in schools

1. Do not attend school if you suspect that you (or any of those you live with) may be coming down with Coronavirus symptoms: follow self-isolation procedures.
2. Keep an eye on the school's website, news links, diary and newsletters to anticipate disruptions to your teaching programme. It may save you a journey and unnecessary risk.
3. Sign in at the school reception on arrival and immediately wash your hands thoroughly before going to the teaching room.
4. Remember that this way of working is as new to school staff and pupils as it is to you. Accept that there will be slips and honest mistakes on both sides and take the opportunity to learn from them.
5. Ask for the school's risk assessments for COVID-19 and for music teaching; ask about anything you do not understand and abide by the control measures specified.
6. Find out what the school's infection control procedures are; follow them and make use of anything the school is good enough to provide for your safety.
7. Find out, before you need to know, what to do if you or pupils fall ill.
8. If you think that a child may be showing symptoms of Coronavirus, stop the lesson and report your concerns to the school immediately.

9. Teach outside if it is practical and weather permits.
10. Maintain 2m or more distance from other people at all times, including pupils (but don't use your instrument cases to enforce this in narrow corridors!).
11. If you can control layout and ventilation in the teaching room, set it up to direct airflow away from both you and the pupil(s) but not at the expense of normal safeguarding or health and safety considerations: i.e. do not move heavy furniture.
12. If the teaching room does not allow for sufficient distancing, explain this to the school. If no reasonable alternative is offered, politely decline to teach that session for the benefit of both you and pupils. If you have one, raise the issue with your manager or equivalent immediately.
13. You may consider wearing a face mask while you are teaching (of course singing, woodwind and brass teachers will need to remove theirs to demonstrate).
14. Avoid touching pupils' instruments, particularly mouthpieces. Carry disposable gloves and hand sanitiser in case you absolutely have to touch a mouthpiece, e.g. to set a reed.
15. Never play on a pupil's mouthpiece or allow them to play on yours.
16. Stick to the agreed timetable as closely as you reasonably can but understand if it has to change at short notice.
17. Wash your hands thoroughly before leaving the school, preferably as the last thing you do before signing out.

Conclusion

Music is more necessary than ever to children's broad and balanced education. The wellbeing benefits seen by many music education providers during lockdown will be ever more needed as children return to school and process their experiences.

Schools may be expecting to narrow their curriculum – even with Ofsted's limited blessing – to make up lost progress and simply for the practical purposes of delivering to smaller groups. If music is to become and remain part of this recovery curriculum, there is a strong onus on music services and other music education providers to demonstrate that they are delivering safely and consistently. We hope that this guidance and successive revisions support you in doing this.

Even after assessing and controlling for foreseeable risks, it is not possible to eliminate all possibility of COVID-19 transmission. Recommended distancing for singing and various instruments is likely to come under review as more data emerge and are analysed. Understanding of fomite transmission (how and even if the virus is transferred by surface contact) and more real-world measurement of the effect of moisture evaporation on transmissibility may change the advice we have given here.

An international study led by two major American associations with the University of Colorado heading up the academic team is now looking specifically at music in education (most of the current studies have

focused on professional playing or adult choirs). This study is almost certain to influence the next versions of this guidance.

It is likely that music education providers will deliver a blend of face-to-face and online services for the foreseeable future and potentially permanently. The sector has shown that it has the creativity and drive to turn this to students' educational advantage.

The innovative practice by providers all over the UK has led the way for the cultural education sector and if you are wondering how to approach any aspect of your offer, ask your contacts, your Regional Representative, the Music Mark team and even (in England) your Arts Council Relationship Manager. Someone, somewhere will have learnt something that can help you.

Music Mark will revisit this guidance as more research is published. Please [feed back your experiences to us](#) and we will reflect what you find useful in future versions of this document.

Further reading

Links are provided for further information and no endorsement of named products is implied or should be inferred.

[Links to studies and information informing this guidance on Music Mark website](#)

<https://www.ism.org/advice-centre/coronavirus-listing>

<https://www.mia.org.uk/covid-19/>

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