



Choral Canada | Canada Choral

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Let's Sing Safely - AN OPEN LETTER FROM CHORAL CANADA

Choral Canada is the national arts service organization for the Canadian choral community and professional choral arts sector.

10% of the Canadian population sings in a choir in almost 28,000 choirs of all kinds according to the 2017 national choral census. That is approximately 3.5 million choristers.¹ Choral singing truly is Canada's national pastime!

As stewards of the choral artform, our #1 priority is the safety and well-being of choristers and the choral industry/sector.

We are seeking constructive avenues of communication among the Canadian Choral community, health officials and policy makers so that we can provide unified guidelines for the choral community. We feel strongly that a thoughtful, informed and collaborative approach is the best way forward.

We are looking to work with health officials and policy makers to find modifications and practical guidelines for safe singing, guidelines that are rooted in scientific research. We seek to create sensible safety guidelines that align with other sectors, such as adult rec hockey, gyms, dance studios, children's soccer camps, etc. In fact, some provinces have already made recommendations for safe singing.

We appreciate the recent intention of the media to highlight how choirs are innovating and trying to survive during this time, but sensationalist headlines do even more damage to this already devastated arts sector including the professionals and associated industries who rely heavily on the choral arts for income. There is a lot at stake here. We cannot overstate the financial, emotional, cultural and physical damage of negative news articles and comments to the entire choral sector. These recent negative headlines have been pointed directly at the choral sector based on little more than anecdotal evidence.

Definitive scientific studies about COVID-19 transmission in relation to singing versus other forms of activities such as loud talking or cheering and other aerobic activity, have yet to be published. The Government of Alberta recognized the lack of credible, scientific evidence surrounding this subject in its Covid-19 Scientific Advisory Group Rapid Evidence Report, stating:

There is a gap in the scientific knowledge regarding the aerosolization of COVID-19 in particular for such activities [singing]. The evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through singing is largely limited to media reports, and it is uncertain whether the transmission that occurred in these settings was related to aerosolization through singing, or through droplet or contact transmission... The committee agreed it is unclear whether the risk of transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus via singing may be caused

¹ January 2017 survey and analysis by Hill Strategies Research for Choral Canada





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by aerosolizing of respiratory particles, or large droplets being expelled, or a combination, or social behaviors associated with close groups (close contact, handshaking, hugging etc.).²

This report was written by a very balanced group of researchers, including a published Infectious Disease physician specializing in the airborne transmission of viruses.

We are presently following studies that are trying to answer questions scientifically. Taking place in Fluid Dynamics labs and Faculties of Medicine at universities in Germany, the United States and Canada among others, this much-needed research will help to inform decision makers on what actually happens with droplets and aerosols when people sing. Preliminary, yet unpublished studies coming out of Europe that are dealing specifically with the behaviour of droplets and aerosols during the act of singing are showing that singing does *not* have as adverse an effect as is being reported.³ We await more definitive evidence from these studies.

We encourage decision making and policy implementation rooted in science, as opposed to unproven, anecdotal or comparative scenarios. We will continue to advocate for clear scientific communication from our leaders and insist that policy be created with integrity from the best available science.

Because there are nearly 28,000 choirs throughout Canada, representing a diversity as vast as this land, a “one size fits all” approach may not be practical. We are eager to work with policy makers to find innovative solutions for safe singing for a variety of choral groups in a variety of scenarios.

Choral Canada

² Alberta Health Services, Covid-19 Scientific Advisory Group Rapid Evidence Report, May 22, 2020, p.2

³ Christian Kähler, et al. <https://www.unibw.de/lrt7-en/making-music-in-times-of-pandemic>.

