



Nova Scotia Choral COVID-19 Singing Restrictions

With voices from the Nova Scotia
community, faith and school choral
communities.



Did You Know? In Canada...

There are 28,000 choirs and 3.4 million singers - 10% of the population.

- 3 times more children under 18 sing in a choir than play hockey.
 - There are about 50% more adult choral singers than hockey players in Canada, with 1.8 million adult choral singers.

There are over 1000 choirs in Nova Scotia. We have a vibrant choral community! Here, almost one in every 4 children sings in a choir (23%).

“Super Spread” Events and Repercussions

Initial reports of “super spread” events: anecdotal; media reports.

- **Government of Alberta Covid-19 Scientific Advisory Group Rapid Evidence Report**
 - “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 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.)”
- **Dr. Juliette O’Keefe from National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health (cited by Public Health Canada)**
 - “In each of the outbreaks listed, multiple transmission routes may have contributed to overall infection levels. General features such as gathering indoors in large groups for prolonged duration, and with close personal interactions, have also featured in other outbreaks.”

National Policies - Public Health Canada

- consider outdoor singing activities, weather permitting
- keep physical distance between each singer to at least 2 metres, and add more distance if possible
- singers that are members of the same household would be at less risk and could sing together while being distanced from others
- organize the choir formation so singers are not facing each other directly or standing less than 2 meters behind each other
- consider opting for performances with fewer performers if distancing cannot be maintained

Nova Scotia Choral Federation Guidelines

- Choral singing in smaller groups (not more than 50)
- 2 metre spacing
- Discouraging shared music/materials
- Staggering singer positions, facing one direction
- Wearing masks to, during and from rehearsals
- Minimizing rehearsal time (30 mins at a time, followed by air change before resuming singing)
- Strict attendance taking and screening of participants
- No participation if exhibiting any symptoms on the Covid list, or if they have been put at higher risk of infection (eg. contact with anyone who travelled outside of bubble)
- Increased ventilation (outside if possible, or open windows, doors, portable air purifiers)
- Cleaning/sanitizing plan required

Community Choirs



Community Choir Singing in NS

Heather Fraser, Conductor, Annapolis Valley Honour Choir & Aeolian Singers

VP Advocacy, Choral Canada

- Community choirs are back rehearsing in person, safely, both with adult and youth - here in NS and in every province across the country.
- There have been **0 reports** of singing resulting in any “super spreader” event in Canada.

Implementing Guidelines

Successes:

- Singers generally concerned for their health (their body is their instrument) and are naturally overly cautious even in regular flu season.
- NS choirs are being extremely diligent. Adhering to all protocols has been extremely easy to mandate.
- No one wants to risk any further damage to our art form and industry.

Challenges:

- Discrepancies between guidelines and the public health order are leading to some confusion and lack of consistency.
- Finding venues that will allow singing in their spaces, and those that allow for appropriate distancing and ventilation. This has become a major barrier to reopening for many choirs.

Faith Based Choirs

Faith based choirs

Kevin Parks, Minister of Music - St. Andrew's Church, University Musician - Atlantic School of Theology

Faith groups (represented by clergy and some musicians from various denominations/faith perspectives and geographic locations) recently met with Dr. Strang. Among other issues, concerns about singing was part of the discussion:

- Dr. Strang clarified that congregational singing is not prohibited, but discouraged
- Current guidance document encourages humming as alternative
- Faith groups: Singing our faith is an important practice, deeply missed when absent
- If you sing, wear a mask and sing softly, along with other safe practices (gathering limits, practice distancing, contact tracing, hand sanitizing)
- Guidance Doc needs an update with most current messages
- Some singing is better than none, by adhering to safe practices and reducing duration (suggested 12 min in an hour of worship) we can safely sing in church
- We understand the fluidity of the situation and if epidemiology worsens it will require return to tighter restrictions.

Choir & Health

“ Singing is known to have a variety of physical health benefits such as improved endurance, breath control, lung health, and posture. It also stimulates healthy brain activity and causes the secretion of endorphins and oxytocin which, in turn, reduce pain, anxiety, and stress, and produce feelings of elation and pleasure. When choir members cannot gather together in-person to sing, they lose out on many of the associated health benefits” (Choral Canada, COVID Analysis Summary).

Choral Singing and Health

Sally O'Neill, Professional Vocalist, Coordinator - Active Pictou County

- **Physical & mental health benefits of choral singing**
 - Choirs, bands and theatre provide important healthy activity to those not drawn to traditional sport and fitness. 82% of Canadian adults are not active enough (ParticipAction 2018 Pulse report, Statistics Canada).
 - Choral singers behave in predictable ways, can be spaced and masked. This is in direct contrast to a basketball game, where players are in constant unpredictable motion, with little control over degree of expressed aerosols or timing of exposure.
- **Community impact**
 - Community choirs, faith based choirs and theatrical choruses are among the few low-cost recreation activities that provide intellectual engagement, physical and mental uplift, as well as social connection on a deeply collaborative level. Particularly important for older adults.

Placed, Spaced and Masked. #SafeSinging

Choir in Schools

Education

Sheila Aucoin, Conductor, North Nova Education Centre Choirs

- **School realities in NS**

- Students are not distanced, class sizes are status quo. Beyond mask wearing, school is normal.
- Policies for school settings (curricular and athletics) do not match singing restrictions.

- **Atlantic bubble comparison**

- All provinces in Atlantic Bubble except NS have allowed in-school singing.

- **Student physical and mental well-being**

- The benefits of choral singing are being overlooked while the benefits of sports are enough to satisfy policy allowing normal play.
- Choir is an equitable activity, with minimal barriers to participation. It is essential for many of our students.

Disparity Between Athletics & Music Policies

High School Athletics	High School Choral
Normal play allowed.	Prohibited from singing in schools.
No distancing required.	Prohibited from singing, even with distancing.
Play allowed outdoors and indoors, up to gathering limit of 50.	Prohibited from singing indoors <u>and</u> outdoors. Prohibited from singing in any group size.
No student masks required during play.	Prohibited from singing, even with masks.
Permitted to travel & compete in full body contact sports against other schools.	Prohibited from singing within school cohorts.
Resumed normal activities October 1 st	Prohibited from singing whatsoever as of October 22 nd

Disparity Between Curricular Policies

- **The same disparity exists between curricular policies in non-music and music courses.**
 - Students attend physical education classes unmasked, while in music class, they are not allowed to sing in any capacity.
 - Core curriculum outcomes cannot be taught with these restrictions, with particular consideration for the limitations on elementary music teachers.
 - At the high school level, course offerings such as Vocals face the same insurmountable challenges.

Support of Choral Community

CAUTIOUS

FLUID

FLEXIBLE

Call to Action: Allow safe singing in schools

Nova Scotia community guidelines allow for distanced, masked, singing in smaller groups. These guidelines have been successfully implemented by community groups across the province and across Canada. Meanwhile, no singing whatsoever is allowed in schools. This is inconsistent with school policies in other curricular subjects as well as extracurricular athletics, despite research showing that speaking loudly (theatre), shouting (physical education) generate similar particle distribution. Singing seems to be singled out. We are asking for consistency, and consideration for the mental and physical wellbeing of music students.

We ask that school policies align with community singing and other Atlantic provincial school singing policies, allowing distanced (6 feet), masked, singing in smaller groups (up to 50, space allowing). We also ask that consideration be granted for curricular elementary music classes where distancing/masking are not possible.

Call to Action: Clarity and Consistency

Section 5.18 (h) Mask Exemption for cultural activities: “a performer or officiant in the course of performing activities requiring vocalization such as talking or singing at an event or activity as described in section 5.4”

This has created an enormous amount of confusion and interpretation among groups.

- *To whom does this apply? Is this for rehearsals/performances? Choirs? (how big?) Soloists or small groups only? In bars? In concert spaces? In theatre? Officiants at worship services?*

Regardless of it being “allowed”, most choirs more than a handful of people would feel comfortable unmasking. This is in opposition to the current NSCF guidelines and best practices across the country.

We ask that the 5.18 mask exemption be clarified in writing.

We also ask that the guidelines for choirs be brought into alignment with public health order to allow for consistency across all singing communities.

Resources Page 1

- Choral Canada, Impact on Canadian Choirs Infographic, https://www.choralcanada.org/uploads/3/8/9/2/38921071/fb_1_.jpg
- Choral Canada, Let's Sing Safely! https://www.choralcanada.org/uploads/3/8/9/2/38921071/open_letter_en_final.pdf
- Government of Alberta, Covid-19 Scientific Advisory Group Rapid Evidence Report https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/p_pih/if-ppih-covid-19-sag-singing-risk-transmission-rapid-review.pdf
- O'Keeffe, J. COVID-19 Risks and Precautions for Choirs. Vancouver, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. 2020 July. <https://ncceh.ca/documents/evidence-review/covid-19-risks-and-precautions-choirs?fbclid=IwAR3LucUbbi1JX1uTUfAaDDrvZ68r1FbXySbEs-pz7xqQhmeacx3u5fs4Xuk>
- Risks and Precautions for Choirs - Dr. O'Keeffe Webinar Presentation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwoZj7SjKF8&feature=emb_logo
- Public Health Canada, Mass Gatherings Risk Assessment: Singing and Choirs <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assessment.html>

Resources Page 2 - Provincial Guidelines

- Nova Scotia Choral Federation, Guidelines - Relaunching & Planning for Choral Singing
<http://www.nscf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/GUIDELINES-RELAUNCHING-AND-PLANNING-FOR-CHORAL-SINGING-IN-NOVA-SCOTIA-August-14.pdf>

Other Samples of Clear Guidelines:

- Alberta - Provincial Singing Guidelines:
https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/a5aa8239-4eef-4dd2-a8e0-c81912d8b6e0/resource/85638d70-d5a5-419d-ae61-579089f8b82e/download/covid-19-relaunch-guidance-for-singing-and-vocal-performance.pdf?fbclid=IwAR14OLqqUYM0ymUsLa_VFq-jdsIBZbCOucnt5EnRKpHuHmYLaLq527j26g4
- NL - Provincial Singing Guidelines:
<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/information-sheets-for-businesses-and-workplaces/group-singing-and-wind-instrument-playing/>