

Let's all sing... and sing safely!

We know so much more about safe singing practices now than we did at the outset of the pandemic. Mounting research has established how to mitigate risk factors in singing, with studies carefully examining how to proceed safely.

Fewer than half the teachers who responded to the *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey* are able to implement recommended guidelines that would allow singing in schools given space and resource limitations.¹

An even larger portion of teacher respondents (69.3%) say they have not yet received those resources required to bring safe singing practices into the classroom: resources we aim to see considered in planning for the coming year.²

PERFORM - (Particulate Respiratory Matter InForm Guidance for the Safe Distancing of Performers in a COVID-19 Pandemic) Study

- Found that singing does not produce substantially more aerosols than speaking at a similar volume.
- Study team recommends that musical organizations consider treating speaking and singing equally.
- Factors to consider for safe singing: number of participants, air exchange rate and ventilation in the space and the duration of rehearsal/performance.

International Coalition of Performing Arts Aerosol Study

- Singers produce aerosols at similar rates as woodwinds and brass.
- When singers wear a well-fitted, three-layer, surgical-style mask, they have a reduced release of aerosols.
- Factors to consider for safe singing: wear masks at all times, 6-foot distancing and consider ventilation by limiting rehearsals to 30 minutes inside (60 minutes outside), followed by a minimum of one air exchange rate.
- Plexiglass partitions are *not* recommended due to HVAC system design limitations in rooms and a concern for aerosol build-up when plexiglass barriers are used.

Want to learn more? Check out these resources:

- [Choirs in the age of coronavirus: A new study looks at the risks of singing.](#)
- [Singing is no more risky than talking - finds new COVID-19 study.](#)
- [Third Round of Performing Arts Aerosol Study Produces More Scientific Data for Return to Activities](#)
- [International Coalition of Performing Arts Aerosol Study Report 3](#)

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey* paints an authentic picture of our experiences as Canadian music educators. The survey sample pool was substantial and representative, with almost 1000 respondents from across the country. Comprehensive survey results hold the potential to guide policy and practice related to singing in schools in the upcoming year, keeping students engaged AND safe. Final report publication to follow.

^{1,2} Morin, F., & Mahmud, M. N. (2021). Singing in Canadian schools: COVID 19 impact survey. Unpublished preliminary findings. Choral Canada.

Let's Return Music to Designated Music Spaces!

Knowing what we know now, music educators and administrators can make music spaces safe for singing and musical learning. It is time to see music teaching and learning back in the spaces designed for music teaching and learning.

Choral and music teachers consider designated music rooms among the necessary supports and resources for providing students with an optimal learning environment. **Most teachers (84%) who completed this survey were teaching in spaces devoted to music education at their schools prior to the pandemic. Now, only 27% of those same teachers are teaching from a space designed for music education¹.**

Survey results also indicate that almost 1/3 of teacher respondents fear they will not have access to dedicated music rooms moving forward. These numbers reported in the preliminary report for the *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey* demonstrate that the immediate pandemic response to move music teachers to carts and music instruction into traditional classrooms – while perhaps a necessary adjustment at the time - cannot become a continued norm.

As policies evolve, music educators have made significant progress, developing safe guidelines that are best implemented in music rooms. These are the spaces designed for music teaching and learning, with access to instruments and space for student movement. These are also the spaces that best support the distancing required for safe singing practices.

It is time to see students learning in the physical spaces designed for music learning and music making!

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Music and Singing: A Pandemic Lifeline

From balcony concerts to live-streamed fundraising events, music has connected strangers and friends as social distancing and gathering limits were implemented worldwide in response to the global pandemic. All with good reason. **Music and singing support mental health and well-being.**

Statistics Canada's research reports that youth are at a higher risk of experiencing poor mental health during the pandemic¹. Students experienced emotional difficulties related to social isolation and stress this past year in response to school closures and online learning².

For many students, the music classroom is their "safe space" where they can learn, grow, and make music without judgment or scrutiny. This is particularly important for marginalized youth, including indigenous, racialized and LGBTQIA2S+ youth who are at increased risk of mental health impacts due to COVID-19³. Several of these marginalized groups have experienced reduced access to choir and group singing programs due to singing restrictions, according to the majority of music teachers who responded to the *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey*⁴.

***"Choir is the only place in school where I feel no one is judging me
and I don't need to pretend to be someone I'm not."***

Grade 11 Nova Scotia Student, 2020

A group of Nova Scotia students penned a song titled "Without Our Voices" in response to their sense of loss tied to singing restrictions in schools during the fall of 2020. You can watch their moving work [here](#). These students, like many, turned to music making to cope during the pandemic and take care of their own emotional well-being⁴. As music educators look ahead to the next school year, we aim to see students return to safe spaces and regain their voices as an invaluable tool for self-expression.

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¹ Statistics Canada (2020). Canadians' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2020039-eng.pdf?st=mOOSUZkG>

^{2,3} Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2020). *Lockdown Life: Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 on Youth in Canada*. https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2021-02/lockdown_life_eng.pdf

⁴ Morin, F., & Mahmud, M. N. (2021). Singing in Canadian schools: COVID 19 impact survey. Unpublished preliminary findings. Choral Canada

Music and Singing in our Schools... Music and Singing in our Lives!

It is hard to imagine a school music program without singing, yet many music educators have had to reimagine music education without singing throughout the pandemic. Their creativity and flexibility is commended. Now, as research continues to emerge to support safe singing practices, music educators look forward to returning to singing in schools, building the foundation for all future music learning.

More than ever, this pandemic experience has made us all realize the importance of music and the arts in our lives. According to the *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey*:

- **71% of respondents' students are unable to engage in music learning through singing in the music classroom due to COVID-19 restrictions on school-based music making;**
- **91% of students who previously enjoyed the benefits of participating in extra or co-curricular singing programs or choral ensembles are missing out on those experiences¹.**

Music is core to our lives and singing is core to music. This is why singing is a key component of music curricula. Music educators apply vocal and choral teaching and learning strategies that provide the foundation, not only for more specialized vocal and choral music programs available to students through middle and high school programs, but for all later music learning and making.

Music educators have demonstrated incredible resilience and creativity and will continue to do so. They CAN implement safe singing, given the resources, space and time to do so. Within both the constraints and possibilities that may exist moving forward, music educators look toward solutions that engage students in safe singing practices in all Canadian schools.

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In-Person Group Singing... An Irreplaceable Experience!

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic came a flurry of virtual choirs, singing together - yet apart. Choral directors across Canada recognized the need for community and connection, despite the inability to sing together in person. While this provided students with a temporary connection to their singing and choir communities, we know virtual group singing is not a replacement for in-person singing experiences.

Even Eric Whitacre, internationally renowned choral conductor and composer, whose Virtual Choir is a true global phenomenon connecting singers from across the world, recognizes the limitations of virtual group singing:

"I'm humbled that this process has been embraced so widely during the current pandemic which has wreaked havoc, not least in the art of choral singing. I must say that however fascinating this journey has been, virtual choir singing cannot and should not take the place of actual ensemble singing. The very significance of that word ensemble (together) goes to the very essence of what choral singing must be, the bringing together of the many to form the voice of the one, together and in real time... What can be learned and achieved when singing together is simply irreplaceable and I, for one, cannot wait to return to being together in song once again."

- Eric Whitacre, 2021

This year, live music performance came to a screeching halt across Canada for student musicians, and professional musicians alike. Students could no longer learn and rehearse together during school closures and/or restricted in-person school learning environments. As a result, **almost all survey respondents (93%) reported that they were not able to undertake live performances with their music students during this year of the COVID-19 pandemic¹.**

Music educators hold that performance is an important component of their students' music learning journeys. Virtual ensembles do not reflect the authenticity of music-making in the classroom, nor offer the many benefits of in-person rehearsal and performance. Creating virtual performances requires an enormous investment of time for audio and video editing. Teachers should not feel any obligation to produce such materials. The focus, as always, should be on creating engaging and collaborative music-making learning experiences. This goal can be achieved by prioritizing a return to safe in-person singing.

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