



# Return to Learn Guidance for the Music Classroom

## Band, Choir, and Orchestra

The Iowa High School Music Association (IHSMA) wishes to acknowledge the work of the New York State School Music Association “The Future of Ensembles – in the COVID-19 Era”. Much of this guidance was extracted from their work.

We have compiled the information below to the best of our ability using current data, as of July 2020, and predictions for the near future. We understand that there is no one-size-fits-all situation and that variations in school facilities will necessitate a wide variety of solutions. We believe that music programs are extremely vital in the COVID-19 era. The health and safety of our students must be paramount during these difficult times. That certainly includes the social and emotional wellbeing of our students. Participation in music is social, and it is also emotional. Schools that make the important decisions to support and foster music education during this global crisis will be doing so in the very best interest of the wellbeing of the students placed in their care.

It is our belief that with proper strategic planning, it can be safe to hold rehearsals. During these unprecedented times, there are health concerns and safety risks in any situation where people gather. If our schools are to reopen before there is an effective vaccination for COVID-19, then it will be impossible for schools to eliminate all risks of infection. However, schools and school personnel will do everything in their power to mitigate those risks. **This document is intended to serve the educational community with the best possible ways to reduce chances of spreading infection within ensemble rehearsals and the music classroom setting**, with the understanding that all schools will be looking to mitigate these risks throughout their buildings.

## GENERAL

### Is there a necessity for social distancing in rehearsals?

- **Social Distancing:** Social distancing is a significant factor in reducing risks of infection. Schools are going to need to find ways to maintain social distancing throughout their buildings. This includes classrooms, gymnasiums, cafeterias, auditoriums and rehearsal rooms.
  - The NFHS/CBDNA Coalition Covid-19 Study recommends:
    - Social distancing should occur as suggested by the CDC. Currently that distance is a 6x6 foot space around each student with the student sitting in the center. This may reduce the number of students that can fit in a performing arts classroom.
    - Straight lines should be used as curved setups can affect the aerosol movement in a room.
    - Students should sit all facing the same direction, back to front to minimize potential exposure.
    - Trombones should have an additional three feet of distancing making their space 9x6. The player should be seated three feet in front of the back line, leaving an additional six feet in front of them due to the extended nature of the instrument and slide that can be in extended position.

Resources:

- [How Well Do Masks Work to Stop Covid-19?](#) – PBS Digital Studios
- [Unprecedented International Coalition Covid-19 Study](#)

### Should students wear facemasks during rehearsals?

- **Face Masks:** Face masks have been scientifically proven to be an effective mitigation technique against the spread of Covid-19.
  - The NFHS/CBDNA Coalition Covid-19 Study recommends:
    - Masks should be worn by all students and staff prior to entering the performing arts room. Masks should continue to be worn until all students are seated and ready for instruction (example, long rests, sectional work, moving around the room, etc.)
    - No talking should occur in the room without a mask being properly worn.
    - When possible a mask with a small slit for mouthpiece access should be worn while playing.
    - In instrument groups where a mask cannot physically be worn the mask should be worn over the chin and replaced during periods where the student is not playing. No talking without a mask.

Resources:

- [How Well Do Masks Work to Stop Covid-19?](#) – PBS Digital Studios
- [Unprecedented International Coalition Covid-19 Study](#)

## What are some considerations for room usage?

- Several of the reports listed below recommend using large spaces with high ceilings for large group rehearsals. Many schools may be able to make use of auditoriums or multi-purpose rooms to allow for proper social distancing. Weather permitting, rehearsing outdoors will significantly reduce risks of infection.

Resources: [Considerations for a Safe Return to the Instrumental Music Classroom](#)

## What procedures can be implemented to make our rehearsal spaces safer?

- Doors opened at the beginning and end of class to ensure students are not touching door handles.
- Schools should consider fitting existing HVAC systems with HEPA filters, with a goal of at least 3 Air Changes per hour (ACH).
- There are also portable HEPA air purifiers on the market to provide additional filtration appropriate to the size of the rehearsal space which will increase the air change rate from standard HVAC systems.
- The typical older classroom has an ACH of 3 which means that it will take 60 minutes to “clean the rooms air” after a 45 min rehearsal. Schools should be aware of the capacities of the HVAC systems and the need to “clean/refresh” the air in rehearsal spaces between rehearsals. Schedules may need to be modified to accommodate this need.
- One-way traffic patterns established for entering and exiting the room, pick-up, and storage of instruments.
- Students should wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after class.
- Students should refrain from sharing classroom materials like pencils, sheet music, music stands, rosin, whenever possible.
- Frequently touched objects in the classroom should be disinfected regularly according to CDC and local guidelines.

Resources:

- [Unprecedented International Coalition Covid-19 Study](#)
- [Considerations for a Safe Return to the Instrumental Music Classroom](#)

## Are there scheduling recommendations for various reopening models?

The American Bandmasters Association Report on Covid-19 Student Safety and Music Program Continuation specifically discusses 4 different scenarios for a blended learning environment:

- Scheduling Scenario 1 – Full School Day with Social Distancing Practices
- Scheduling Scenario 2 – A/B School Day Designed to Reduce School Density
- Scheduling Scenario 3 – Blended Music Instruction Including a Combination of In-Person Meetings and Internet-Based Video Conference Participation
- Scheduling Scenario 4 – If Classroom Space Limitations Require Multiple Groups to Trade Rooms (Band – Week One, Choir – Week Two, Etc.) or If No Other Possibility for In-School Exists

Resource: [ABA Covid-19 Student Safety and Music Program Continuation Ideas for Consideration \(Page 5, Part 2\)](#)

## How many music students can I safely fit in my room at any one time?

- Occupancy must now be determined by the size of the room, the HVAC air flow rate (your Physical Plant Staff should be able to assist with this), and the type of activity occurring in the room all affect the amount of aerosols present at any given time. Through the work being done by the Unprecedented International Coalition led by Performing Arts Organizations to Commission COVID-19 Study co-chaired by the Dr. James Weaver, NFHS Fine Arts Director and Dr. Mark Spede, CBDNA, a tool for calculating the occupancy for each room setting has been devised. That tool, developed by the University of Colorado, can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/covid-estimator> NFHS is working on a web-based version that is estimated to be available at the end of July.

## How long does the virus live inside instruments and on surfaces?

- The NFHS, NAFME and the NAMM Foundation received information from the CDC which suggest the COVID-19 virus can remain on the following instrument surfaces for the stated amount of time: Brass – Up to 5 Days, Wood – Up to 4 Days, Plastic – Up to 3 Days, Strings – Up to 3 Days, Cork – Up to 2 Days

Resources:

- [COVID-19 Instrument Cleaning Guidelines](#)

- [Sterilization Meets The Music Industry: The Extreme Clean](#)
- [How To Clean & Disinfect Your Violin, Viola, Cello or Double Bass during COVID-19](#)

## How long do the particles stay airborne in each classroom after a rehearsal?

- Micro droplets carry many viruses. We produce them when we speak loudly or breath heavily. The risk of micro droplet spread is greatly increased when people are in close proximity with poor ventilation. The use of a mask/face shield greatly reduces how far micro droplets can spread. The research study cited below shows micro droplets staying airborne in the immediate area for more than 20 minutes. Preliminary research results of the NFHS/CBDNA research study supports that finding. Some strategies for addressing that concern include:
  - Creating two openings in the room will remove micro droplets rapidly. This should be done at least once per hour.
  - Through use of HEPA filters and by increasing the Air Changes per Hour (ACH) in that space.

Resources:

- Research Study: [Micro droplets suspending in air](#)
- [Unprecedented International Coalition Covid-19 Study](#)

## Are there recommendations for ventilation of rehearsal rooms?

- When singing and playing music takes place in closed rooms with natural ventilation, previous experience seems to show that regular and thorough ventilation seems to be an important factor in risk reduction. Rooms should be mechanically ventilated (ventilation and air conditioning systems, HVAC). The coalition study cited above led by the NFHS/CBDNA has found that HEPA filtration systems (portable and/or within the existing HVAC systems) can aid in reducing the amount of aerosols present in spaces where large numbers of students congregate (see specifications above).

Resources:

- [Risk Assessment of a Coronavirus Infection in the Field of Music \(Pages 13-14\)](#)
- [Unprecedented International Coalition Covid-19 Study](#)

## Will live performances be possible?

- At this point – we simply don't know. If live performances for an audience are not advisable, live streamed or pre-recorded concerts may be a feasible alternative. It is important to check with publishers and copyright holders for proper licensing.
- Small ensemble vs full ensemble performances may be an option.
- If a program consists of multiple ensembles, consider multiple performances with a reduced number of ensembles.

## Additional Guidance for Band

### Do instruments that have not been used since school closed need to be cleaned?

- If students are picking up instruments for the first time since school has been closed, those instruments will not need more than general cleaning.
- If distributing instruments for the first time since schools have closed, the NFHS and NAFME recommend, out of an abundance of caution, that all cases be sprayed with an aerosol disinfectant.

Resource: [COVID-19 Instrument Cleaning Guidelines](#)

### How should shared/personal instruments be “cleaned/sanitized”?

- The University of Nevada-Las Vegas, School of Music has provided a resource as a reminder for proper hygiene related to music instruments. This guide has been adapted with language that is relevant for anyone playing music instruments in a school environment.

Resources:

- [COVID-19 Safety Tips For Musicians](#)

- [How To Clean & Disinfect Your Violin, Viola, Cello or Double Bass during COVID-19](#)

## What safety concerns are there regarding wind instruments?

- **Brass**
  - According to studies, the smaller the bell the more air movement in front of the instrument. However, none exceeded the safety range of 3 feet. (5.1)
  - The use of some sort of material to block the flow of droplets and aerosols is also recommended. (5.3) According to the coalition study, bell covers are highly recommended as "masks" for the instruments. Bell covers can be made of multi-layered high denier nylon material and provide a barrier for aerosols.
  - Spit valves should not be emptied on the floor. Recommend using a puppy pad (or similar) to catch the contents of the spit valve and discard.
- **Woodwinds**
  - The amount of air movement detected in woodwinds is definitely greater than brass instruments due to the smaller blowing openings and the less resistance. The clarinet, oboe and bassoon achieved a little over 3-foot distance while the flute was a little larger. (5.2)
  - The use of some type of material or divider to block the droplets and aerosols is recommended. (5.3) According to the coalition study, bell covers are highly recommended as "masks" for the instruments. Bell covers can be made of multi-layered high denier nylon material and provide a barrier for aerosols.

Resources:

- [Singing in choirs and making music with wind instruments – Is that safe during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic?](#)
- [Unprecedented International Coalition Covid-19 Study](#)

## Which accommodations to rehearsal rooms may be helpful to ensure a safer environment?

- Storage areas should be managed to limit the number of students at a time in the room. Anyone who enters the room should bring a 70% alcohol wipe to wipe all surfaces before and after touching. The wipe should be discarded properly upon leaving the storage area.
- Possible use of room dividers or plexiglass shields.
- Limit sharing of instruments/supplies/equipment.
  - Including music and percussion mallets.
  - For percussionists, a suggestion to assign each their own stick bag with all necessary mallets and sticks.
- Additional technology to accommodate a blended model of teaching.
  - i.e. half the band face to face and half simultaneously on video conference. Alternate days.
  - Allows students working from home to experience and play along with a full band rehearsal.
- Materials needed to clean music stands, chairs, etc, should be readily available.

Resources:

- [Unprecedented International Coalition Covid-19 Study](#)
- Many excellent recommendations can be found in this document from the American Bandmasters Association: [ABA Covid-19 Student Safety and Music Program Continuation Ideas for Consideration](#)
- The video of the Czech Philharmonic referenced in the ABA report can be found here: <https://slippedisc.com/2020/04/watch-czech-horns-woodwinds-play-concert-in-masks/>

## Which protective measures can be effective?

- Teachers should consider using a portable amplifier to keep their voices at a low conversational volume. Students should also ask questions in a low conversational volume with a mask.
- Teachers are assumed to talk the most and as a result should wear the most efficient mask possible that is readily available, which are surgical masks. (N95s are not recommended at this time due to supply chain issues.)
- In order to effectively limit the ballistic flight of large droplets and to contain the spread of aerosols due to air movement, it is advisable to attach a very thin and tightly woven silk (pantyhose?) or paper towel in front of the opening of the bell. A dense pop-screen such as that used in front of studio microphones is also very suitable.
- It is advisable to empty the condensed water that builds up in instruments more frequently than usual. Emptying the water into puppy pad or a bowl with some detergent or dishwashing liquid are recommended techniques.

Resources:

- [Unprecedented International Coalition Covid-19 Study](#)
- [Singing in choirs and making music with wind instruments – Is that safe during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic? \(Page 6, Section 5.3\)](#)

## Additional Guidance for Chorus

### How should my rehearsal room be set up for instruction?

- Singing in very large rooms is best. Masks specifically designed for singing are recommended as best practice. If meeting indoors, increased natural ventilation is highly recommended (Morawska). Students should be appropriately distanced, taking necessary precautions as per school guidelines.
- Consider separating your choir into smaller sections following the schedule determined by your school district. (A/B day rotation, half day, etc)
- Consider the option to rehearse in the auditorium (if the classroom is not adequate) while following social distancing guidelines. If possible, weather permitting, consider the option of rehearsing outdoors.

Resources:

- [Unprecedented International Coalition Covid-19 Study](#)
- Morawska, L., Cao, J. (2020, April). [Airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2: the world should face the reality](#). Environment International, 2020 Apr 10: 105730.
- [ACDA COVID-19 Response Committee Report](#)

### Are there alternatives to sharing music?

- Each singer should have individual copies of music; no sharing of materials.
- Consider purchasing additional copies of music through your building's textbook fund.
- Project music on a large screen.
- Consider eliminating storage of folders, music in the rehearsal space. Each singer should take materials with them after each rehearsal.

### What are possible strategies to reduce the spread of droplets and aerosols during choral rehearsals?

- Strategic placement of singers with suggested physical distance.
- Pivot instructional strategies to reduce the number of singers singing at any given time.
- Use of humming during the learning process rather than open mouth singing.
- Use of student leadership (at the upper levels) for student led instruction which will allow for smaller group instruction.
- Avoid touching, choreography, singing/playing in circles.
- Consider activities for the purpose of stretching or "warm-ups" that would require no touching or exaggerated exhalation.

Resource: [ACDA Covid-19 Committee Report](#)

### What other musical activities related to choral singing are possible in a rehearsal setting?

- Skill building activities
- Literacy skills, recording themselves and submitting
- Project-Based Learning
- Guided and critical listening to other ensembles
- Composition (perhaps with a local composer)
- Working towards an "honor choir" project, students will receive repertoire and prepare for performance

## Additional Guidance for Orchestra

### Can students share music stands and sheet music?

- This should be avoided when possible. This practice will help ensure that there is no direct contact with shared surfaces.
- Whether or not items are shared, hand washing before and after class continues to be strongly recommended.

Resource: [Risk Assessment of a Coronavirus Infection in the Field of Music](#)

### Can orchestra students share instruments?

- The transfer or sharing of musical instruments should be avoided if at all possible.
- If this cannot be avoided, then disinfection between each use must be done.
- See links on individual musical instruments disinfection for further information.

Resource: [Risk Assessment of a Coronavirus Infection in the Field of Music](#)

### How do I disinfect string instruments?

- **Strings, fingerboard, chin rest, tuning pegs, and other non-varnished surfaces:** use alcohol-based wipes folded into a small, easily controlled wipe so that you don't accidentally touch a varnished surface (this can be done daily).
- **Varnished surfaces:**
  - Daily: wipe the surface down with your soft cloth.
  - Weekly: Use a damp cloth with a small amount (just a dab) of weak liquid dishwashing detergent and rub that all over the varnished areas of the instrument. Then use a second damp cloth (wrung out so it doesn't drip) to then clean off the soap from the instrument. Lastly – use a paper towel to pick up any excess water.

Resources:

- [How To Clean & Disinfect Your Violin, Viola, Cello or Double Bass during COVID-19](#)