
Backstage Theatre in the Face of COVID-19

“Non-professional performing arts can rehearse or perform together in line with performing arts guidance if they can ensure there is no interaction between more than 6 at any time (including when arriving or leaving). Unlike professional performers, non-professionals are restricted by rules on meeting with others safely” -- [Working Safely in the Performing Arts](#)

These guidelines are based on and build upon the following documents – please refer to them for more information:

GOVERNMENT

- [Working Safely in the Performing Arts](#)
- [Face Coverings: When to wear one and how to make your own](#)
- [Coronavirus Outbreak FAQs: What you can and can't do](#)

LOCAL

- [Oxford Coronavirus Information and Guidance](#)

UNIVERSITY

- [Rehearsal Guidance](#)
- [University Coronavirus page](#)
- [Face Coverings policy](#)
- [Risk Assessment for Performing Arts](#)
- [Risk Assessment for Outdoor Audience Events](#)

VENUE

- [Keble O'Reilly Theatre](#)

Things to Note:

Make sure that you check with your venue what precautions they have in place, whether there are further precautions they would like you to observe, and what protective equipment they're able to supply you with.

In all cases, where social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full:

- Increase the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning
- Keep activity time as short as possible
- Use back-to-back or side-to-side positioning rather than face-to-face whenever possible
- Use screens or partitions

The 'Six Person Rule':

- Government guidance advises non-professional theatre organisations to follow normal rules on members of different households meeting.

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- Currently, no more than six individuals from different households can meet at once unless in a COVID-secure venue. Where performance or rehearsal venues have been deemed COVID-secure by University authorities they may grant special permission to allow more than six people.

Symptoms / Positive Test

You should not feel afraid to challenge a company member who shows symptoms and to turn them away from a meeting, run-through, etc.

In the event of a company member developing COVID-19 symptoms, they should self-isolate immediately and inform those who they have been in close contact with (within the last 14 days) that they should also self-isolate. The member should get a test as soon as possible (<https://www.ox.ac.uk/coronavirus/health/covid-testing>) and tell inform the COVID-19 Officer. They should self-isolate for at least 10 days from when the symptoms started and at least 10 days from receiving a positive test result.

In the event of a positive case of COVID-19, all members of the company who the individual have come into contact with should also isolate. If the performance occurs within 14 days, it should be cancelled.

Venues should be notified when a company member is symptomatic and in the case of a positive test result.

Emergencies

In an emergency, for example, an accident, provision of first aid, or fire, people do not have to social distance if it would be unsafe. Following the emergency, those involved should pay particular attention to sanitation measures.

Pre-Show

COVID-19 Officer

All companies should appoint a 'COVID-19 Officer' to act as the official point of contact concerning COVID-19 regulations. They should be a company member who already holds a leadership position and interacts with both cast and crew, e.g. producer or assistant producer.

It is the responsibility of the COVID-19 Officer to ensure all company activities adhere to Government, University and venue advice. They should make sure that all company members understand the guidelines.

The COVID-19 officer is the point of contact for all company members in the case of any issue, non-compliance, or a case of COVID-19. They are also the point of contact for all rehearsal and performance venues concerning COVID-19 related regulations.

The COVID-19 Officer should work closely with the company's welfare contact to ensure an open dialogue, safety and wellbeing during the production process.

A list of company members should be compiled by the COVID-19 officer, recording: name, college, subject (including year of study and undergrad/grad/postdoc, email address, mobile telephone number and termtime address. They should make a note of any company members who are in the same 'household'. This list may be required by performance venues.

Risk Assessment

The OUDS risk assessment template is available [here](#), and it also covers many of the points discussed below. It provides suggestions of countermeasures you could take to make your production safer. The Oxford SU and the University have developed support for students organising events this academic year: a comprehensive interactive resource is now available [here](#).

After making a COVID-19 risk assessment, share it with all members of your cast and crew. It's important to encourage a dialogue so that everyone knows what precautions are in place and can contribute to safety. Make sure that the risk assessment is updated as risks and guidance changes.

Meetings

Where possible, production meetings should be virtual. Where this is not practical, they should be held in a well-ventilated space or outdoors, and kept as brief as possible.

You should keep a record of who attends in-person meetings. This information should be kept for 21 days in line with Government requirements for Test and Trace.

Advice on ensuring welfare during online interactions can be found in the OUDS quarantine welfare guidance ([here](#)).

Face Coverings

Make sure that you're wearing face coverings where they're required by university policy (see hyperlinks above)

Set

Maintain social distancing during set construction. Do as much as you're able to with only one person, but make sure you have sufficient, well-ventilated space if you need more.

Show Week

Perform in a well-ventilated space or outdoors.

All company members attending get-in/out, technical rehearsals, dress runs and performances should sign in and sign out, to facilitate contact tracing.

During Get In / Out

Maintain social distancing at all times, wearing face coverings as appropriate.

The lighting, sound and set design should, as much as possible, use equipment and pieces that can be carried by only one person, or two people 2m apart. Where this isn't possible, face coverings should be worn and those involved should stand side-by-side rather than face-to-face.

Cleaning

Before and after performances, follow the venue's cleaning regulations, paying special attention to touch points (e.g. handles, hand rails, taps) and shared spaces (e.g. green room, box office, tech box).

Costume, Hair & Makeup

To reduce transmission, separate individual cast members' costumes in plastic bags. Costumes should be laundered and individually covered and between each use.

When they change, cast members' own clothes should be kept inside labelled plastic bags.

Minimise the number of quick changes in the production.

As much as possible, ask performers to do their own hair and makeup, allocating kit and products to each cast member, to be sterilised each day and only used on them.

Where performers are not able to do their own hair, makeup or costume-fitting, a member of crew can help them, taking further precautions to 'replace' social distancing. The best and safest practice would be for an individual in the performer's household to help them.

Crew

In order to minimise transmission, the same crew members should take the same roles during each performance. The number of crew taking both front of house and backstage roles should be minimised.

A one-way system could be put in place backstage to aid social distancing.

Props & Stage Management

Social distancing must be maintained backstage at all times. Consider where to position stage managers and cast waiting in the wings to ensure this is possible. Also make sure that props and set items can be reached by appropriate cast members without infringing social distancing.

Limit as much as possible the sharing of props, and consider using duplicate props where practical.

Props should be cleaned after every performance and between uses.

When hiring props from the TAFF store, wear a mask and sanitise your hands on entry. Maintain social distancing and only touch what you are intending to hire.

Sound & Lighting

Consider limiting the number of suppliers when hiring equipment. Clean hired equipment when it arrives and before first use.

Refrain from playing music or broadcasts that may encourage shouting or singing, including if played at a volume that makes normal volume difficult, for example during an interval.

To protect audience members and technicians, consider placing a screen around sound and lighting desks, or otherwise leaving a space around them to comply with social distancing.

To maintain social distancing, it may be necessary to position some operators outside of the tech box.

Sound and lighting equipment including desks, mics, battery packs, music stands and switches should be cleaned regularly.

Where radio mics are used, company members should not share them, they should use the same mic each night, and all mics should be cleaned after each use. Company members should equip their own radio mics.

Cans should similarly not be shared, and should be cleaned after each use.

The Audience

Where possible, encourage guests to purchase tickets online and to use e-ticketing. Where this is not the case, encourage contactless payment, and frequently sanitise payment points and ticketing equipment. Social distancing should be observed when checking tickets.

Inform your audience of the precautions you have in place for them to follow when they attend. Encourage them to support the safety of the event: wear a mask, following one-way systems, follow social distancing. Ask them not to bring bags and coats that might clutter the space and impede distancing.

Clearly communicate that audience members who should be isolating should not attend.

Ensure that your capacity is at a level that allows social distancing to be maintained by the audience. Individuals and households (of no more than 6) should be seated 2m apart, or more than 1m with robust risk mitigations in place.

Make sure that audience members maintain social distancing when they enter and leave the venue, by using one-way systems and accessible signposting. If necessary, stagger entry times and take steps to avoid queues building up in surrounding areas. Consider especially that crowding is likely to occur at points of entry and exit, handwashing and toilet facilities and waiting areas.

Consider the particular needs of disabled audiences when adjusting venues' seating space and entry routes.

Keep a record of who attends performances; this information needs to be kept for 21 days, in line with Government requirements for Test and Trace. Some venues may require you to record where each audience member sits.

If you would like any **more information**,
or a **more accessible version** of this document, feel free to contact
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