

Public Health Guidelines for Harmony Brigade Singing December 2022

The good news is that progress against the COVID-19 (SARS CoV-2) pandemic has allowed us to sing again at Harmony Brigade rallies with a much lower risk of serious disease or illness, either in brigade participants, our families, our audiences, or the general public.

But singing—particularly in close quarters, with large numbers of people, in poorly-ventilated spaces, and/or face-to-face—is among the highest risk activities for transmission of respiratory viruses such as COVID-19 and influenza.

Unfortunately, events of the past three years, as well as warnings of a severe influenza season in the winter of 2022-23 and rising hospitalizations due to RSV and other respiratory illnesses, have made it clear that ongoing vigilance against respiratory viruses and other risks to the public health remains vitally important. Variants of COVID-19 have demonstrated the ability to rapidly change, similar to cold viruses, and to avoid pre-existing immunity from vaccines or prior infections. COVID-19 is likely to become another of the many respiratory viruses that circulate across the world for the foreseeable future.

Even with this change in the dynamics of the pandemic, **the XQRAC recommends** that there should be ongoing implementation of reasonable recommendations to reduce the risks associated with many respiratory viral infections in the Harmony Brigade setting.

We anticipate that this will be the last piece of guidance that the XQRAC will issue. There are two parts. The first addresses remaining issues for Harmony Brigades regarding COVID-19. The second is a broader set of measures that brigades should consider on an ongoing basis to help protect everyone's health against many respiratory illnesses in the future.

Recommended measures against COVID-19 infections at Harmony Brigade rallies

Each of the following policies is likely to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection transmission in a brigade setting, and the more that are implemented, the greater the benefit:

- **Vaccinations.** In order to minimize risks of severe illness and/or death, attendees should be strongly advised to follow their physician's advice on COVID-19 vaccinations as they are developed and implemented.
- **Boosters.** Abundant medical evidence shows that vaccine boosters, including the most recent bivalent vaccines that protect against newer variants of the COVID-19 virus, provide increased protection as the effects of the initial vaccines wane. It is *highly recommended* that attendees follow their physician's advice regarding COVID-19 boosters.
- **Testing.** COVID-19 can be spread before one feels symptoms. The only way that is available to detect if one is infectious is through regular antigen testing of nose secretions. Attendees should be required to conduct quick antigen self-tests on arrival,

before singing at the rally. It is highly recommended to test again on Saturday morning and Sunday morning. Those who are positive should self-isolate.

Although it may be inconvenient to *perform daily testing*, and for attendees with positive results to stop participating, this simple procedure has been shown to be highly effective in reducing widespread transmission to other close contacts. A single infectious person could infect a large number of other attendees and some of these persons may develop illnesses serious enough to require hospitalization, cause prolonged adverse effects on their health, or cause death. It is good citizenship for attendees to acknowledge this risk and to self-defer if they have symptoms or test positive.

- *Air Circulation and turnover.* There is a need for the highest-flow air turnover that the hotels' systems allow. Work with the hotel to maximize air circulation whenever possible. Periodically move from singing in one room to another singing room. Let rooms have "down time" of an hour or more. Increase outside ventilation if available, such as keeping one or more windows or doors open. Encourage outdoor singing where possible.
- *Create a brigade "bubble" and encourage participants to stay within the bubble.* Discourage singing in unauthorized areas of the hotel. Limit or discourage non-participants from entering the singing areas.
- *Participants should withdraw if they experience any symptoms.* Protect your friends and fellow singers! Anyone experiencing fever, unusual cough, or other respiratory symptoms in the days shortly before or during the brigade rally should refrain from participating and singing with others. Offer a single hotel room for any attendee who experiences symptoms after arrival to the rally or tests positive and needs to self-isolate until they return home via air travel. Ideally, move the ill person's roommate to a single "clean" room.
- *Singouts and public performances.* Be aware of local conditions and regulations before proceeding.
- *Refer attendees to CDC, Covid Act now, and other websites* to check current recommendations and state of the pandemic/endemic and make their own choices.
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
 - <https://covidactnow.org/>
- *Publish and inform* the attendees of the public health protocols and measures that the Brigade is taking against COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.
- *Have attendees sign a waiver of liability* for COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.
- *Followup for infections following the rally.* Brigade leaders should require that attendees inform them if they fall ill with COVID-19 within 5 days following a rally. Brigade leadership should inform all attendees if COVID-19 infections have been identified during the rally or following the rally, but maintain confidentiality of those who were ill or tested positive.

Recommended ongoing measures to reduce risks for spread of all respiratory viral infections at Brigade Rallies

Each of the following measures is likely to reduce the risk of transmitting a variety of respiratory illnesses in a brigade setting. The more of them that are implemented, the lower the likelihood of a significant transmission event. Brigade leaders should consider the following measures ***in addition to the above***, to reduce risk of transmission of other respiratory diseases at singing events:

- Encourage attendees to consult with their physicians for vaccination for major respiratory illnesses, including influenza, pneumonia and future boosters for COVID-19.
- Negotiate with the hotel that you will need flexibility in the number of rooms so that ill or antigen-positive participants can self isolate in a single room without penalty.
- Use electronic dance cards (Atlantic Harmony Brigade has an App for that).
- Don't share pitchpipes.
- Be accepting of attendees who want to wear masks.
- Allow as much space between participants as possible at tables for meals. If a buffet, consider rolling meal times to increase spacing.
- Provide hand sanitizer in singing areas and encourage attendees to use it regularly. Include a small hand gel bottle with each registration.
- Encourage participants to bring their own, identifiable reusable water bottles, to minimize the risk of accidentally drinking from someone else's bottle. Provide bottled water on a pay-by-honor system, to encourage singers to bring their own bottles.
- Be prepared to make quick changes if any illness (especially COVID-19) spikes in severity or transmissibility either locally or on a large-scale basis.
- Follow local guidance and regulations regarding public shows and singouts in terms of social distancing and masking. Encourage virtual shows when necessary for health reasons. For live shows, minimize contact between participants and audience members.
- Produce a list of local hospitals and urgent care offices so that attendees can have quick access to medical care if needed.
- Encourage participants to stay in single rooms, or with close acquaintances. Minimize random matching of roommates from different regions when possible.
- Make it easy for attendees to withdraw without undue financial penalty in the preceding weeks before the rally if they fall ill, are exposed to a virus, or experience symptoms of transmissible respiratory illness.

Thank you for your leadership!

The eXtreme Quartetting Reopening Advisory Committee (XQRAC)