

STATES OF JERSEY



SAFE SINGING DURING COVID-19

Lodged au Greffe on 17th November 2020
by Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of the opinion –

- (a) that the current guidelines on singing should be amended to allow a wider variety of singing activities, including whole class singing, to take place within schools, both indoors and outdoors, so long as it takes place within an established class bubble; and
- (b) that the Minister for Health and Social Services should consult with a representative group of Jersey singers and musicians in the development of these and all future guidelines around safe singing policies during the Covid-19 outbreak.

DEPUTY L.M.C. DOUBLET OF ST. SAVIOUR

REPORT

Since March, the restrictions on group singing in Jersey have been informed largely by international studies of ‘superspreading’ events occurring as a result of adult choir performances and rehearsals. According to the BMJ, five factors promote superspreading:

1. High rates or intensity of contact between people or with surfaces;
2. Large aggregations of people;
3. Poorly ventilated physical environments, especially indoors;
4. Highly infectious individuals;
5. Highly susceptible recipient population.¹

The report authors highlight that settings where superspreading has occurred – like adult choir practices, for example - combine the risk factors of high densities of people, a high-risk activity (singing), and potentially poorly ventilated indoor spaces, and this has been used as the basis for restricting adult group singing by our own Government.

However, there has been very little nuance in the guidance pertaining to group singing involving children and young people, which does not conform to the same risk factors as those affecting adult group singing for reasons this report will set out. Currently the Government advises that the only kind of singing permitted for children and young people in full time education is in the context of one-to-one lessons with a minimum of 1 metre physical distancing between adults and between adults and children. Group lessons or practice that includes vocals are only permitted where it is a requirement of the school or exam syllabus and should be limited to the minimum number required by the curriculum or exam board (GCSE 3 performers and A level 3 performers).²

However, this guidance excludes younger children, who are not yet receiving formal lessons or being assessed in terms of examinations. For primary school aged children (especially in EYFS and KS1) singing is routinely used – often as frequently as speech – in learning phonics, numeracy skills and in gaining valuable confidence in terms of speech and language.

Class Bubbles and Singing

Many of the risk factors for superspreading occurring from group singing do not apply in the case of children already operating within a designated ‘class bubble’. This means that the children in each year group do not have any contact with pupils from other year groups, and staggered drop off and pick up times reduce the risk of transmission between year groups and carers further. Therefore younger school children do not currently have high rates of contact between different groups, as a mixed choir does. Class sizes are small, and classroom based singing activities do not include audiences of parents or other schoolchildren and teachers. Although children are indoors, the classrooms are routinely sanitised and deep cleaned each day to reduce the daily aggregation of respiratory droplets. Furthermore, children are not ‘highly infectious individuals’ or ‘superspreaders’ as a recent British Medical Journal paper³ summarising public health data from a range of different country identifies. It is clear that children who are already

¹ Kain, Morgan P., et al. "Chopping the tail: how preventing superspreading can help to maintain COVID-19 control." medRxiv (2020).

² <https://www.gov.je/health/coronavirus/educationchildcare/pages/reopeningofschools.aspx>

³ <https://adc.bmj.com/content/archdischild/105/7/618.full.pdf>

talking, chanting, shouting, coughing and laughing within a class bubble are likely to be producing similar rates of respiratory droplets as they would if singing. It makes sense therefore to take the step to re-introduce singing into schools taking into account the different risk factors that classroom singing represents.

Bearing in mind the importance of following medical advice at this time, I made contact directly with a member of the research team for the recent PERFORM (Particulate Respiratory Matter to InForm Guidance for the Safe Distancing of Performers in a COVID-19 Pandemic) study⁴ which compared respirable aerosol concentrations and particle size distributions generated by singing, speaking and breathing. I was able to discuss the findings of this study and the current science in this area, and ask questions around the aims I am intending to achieve with this proposition. There was agreement that there is a robust scientific basis for revising the restrictions on singing and I asked for a direct quote to confirm this:

“Singing and speaking generate roughly equivalent amounts of aerosol at the same volumes. The idea that singing is inherently a “dangerous” activity is therefore not borne out by our study. It is worth bearing in mind that other jurisdictions have permitted singing (both amateur and professional) to open up following the previous very tight restrictions.”

Quote from Declan Costello
Researcher on the PERFORM Study
Consultant ENT Surgeon specialising in voice disorders
Wexham Park Hospital Slough
King Edward VII’s Hospital London
Bridge Clinic Maidenhead

The reasonable conclusion to make here is that as there is no significant increase in aerosol production when singing at the same volume as speech, singing itself should not be restricted. If there are mitigations to be put in place they should be on the audible **volume** of the activity, not the **type** of activity. In terms of educational settings, teachers are very used to carrying out risk assessments and even more so given our current situation. Guidance on mitigations that can be put in place are available directly from the PERFORM researchers and others in the field (see <https://www.musicmark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Children-and-School-Singing-During-the-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf>). For example, ventilating the room or singing outside, distancing the teacher from the children or the children from each other, and crucially – singing at a lower volume to match the general volume of speech in the classroom.

Benefits of Singing for Children – What Are They Missing Out On?

A [2012 Paper](#) from the Institute of Education, University of London summarised the physical, psychological, social, musical and educational benefits of singing based on the evaluation of data from the National Singing Programme [Sing Up](#) (which promotes opportunities to engage in regular singing for children and young people.) The programme identifies that singing plays a critical role in children’s learning and development:

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https://chemrxiv.org/articles/preprint/Comparing_the_Respirable_Aerosol_Concentrations_and_Particle_Size_Distributions_Generated_by_Singing_Speaking_and_Breathing/12789221

- **Singing is Essential for Literacy and Language Development in Children**

“The more that the vocal system is used appropriately, such as in healthy singing, the more that the underlying anatomy and physiology realise their potential in terms of growth and motor coordination. This is very important in childhood and into adolescence because it is a time when the underlying basis for lifelong vocal identity and effective communication are established.”

“Increasing knowledge, understanding and skills about the world around us, both in music and through music Singing will likely make you more competent in your own language, including an improvement in reading skills. Reading lyrics and reading music are processed in the same neurocortical regions for symbol decoding.”

- **Singing Develops Children’s Confidence and Promotes Social Inclusion**

“Confident and healthy voice use links to a positive self-concept and an ability to communicate. Successful singing promotes self-esteem, general confidence and also self-efficacy. The voice is a key component of who we are; its use reflects our mood and general psychological wellbeing, communicated to ourselves as well as to others.”

“Healthy singing enables us to maximise our potential to communicate with others. We learn to improve our underlying vocal coordination, to increase vocal colour and impact intentional variety into our vocal communication. Indeed, for 25% of the working population, voice is a critical tool-of-trade (e.g. teachers, lawyers, clergy, telephone salespeople, actors, singers, and businesspeople). Singing exercises the basic voice mechanism and improves its functional capability.”

“Singing is important because it builds self-confidence, promotes self-esteem, always engages the emotions, promotes social inclusion, supports social skill development, and enables young people of different ages and abilities to come together successfully to create something special in the arts.”

At the UCL Institute of Education, [Professor Susan Hallam reviewed evidence](#) on the impact of music making on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people. She concluded that:

“There is considerable and compelling evidence that musical training sharpens the brain’s early encoding of sound leading to enhanced performance on a range of listening and aural processing skills.”

Restricting singing in schools deprives children and teachers of opportunities to embody learning and develop key social, emotional and intellectual skills which enrich educational and social outcomes. More significantly, it promotes wellbeing and stress relief for children at a time when they are placed under often complex and confusing restrictions and regimes. It is vital that the fundamental importance of sung activity in classrooms is recognised at a time when the wellbeing of children in Jersey is in the spotlight.

Adult singing

Evidence shows that singing is also hugely important for the wellbeing and health of many adults who participate in this activity. A recent article⁵ from the University of Oxford summarised the many benefits of singing for adults:

- Music making [exercises the brain](#) as well as the body
- Singing is particularly beneficial for [improving breathing, posture and muscle tension](#)
- Listening to and participating in music has been shown to be effective in [pain relief](#), too, probably due to the release of neurochemicals such as [β-endorphin](#) (a natural painkiller responsible for the “high” experienced after intense exercise)
- Music can play a role in [sustaining a healthy immune system](#), by reducing the stress hormone cortisol and boosting the Immunoglobulin A antibody
- Regular choir members report that learning new songs is cognitively stimulating and helps their memory, and it has been shown that singing can help those suffering from [dementia](#), too.

In the same way that government has constructively engaged with the sporting community to safely create guidance which has enabled islanders to actively participate in sport during the pandemic, we must engage with the singing/music community. I have been in touch with a group (current working name ‘Jersey Music’ but this may be reviewed) which includes choir conductors, singing teachers and experts in the field and they are willing and keen to engage in constructive dialogue in this area. Their voices must be listened to and we must consider the wider health and wellbeing of those who rely on music for community engagement and a boost to their health and wellbeing.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no financial and manpower implications arising from this proposition.

⁵ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/choir-singing-improves-health-happiness-%E2%80%93-and-perfect-icebreaker>