

The Community Theatre Reopening Guide

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Version History

Version #	Date	Revised By	Reason for Change
1.1	August 10, 2020	Neill Kernohan	Added "Version History". Added new information regarding the Contract Tracing App to both the "Health and Hygiene" and the "Production Issues" sections.

How to Use this Guide

The Community Theatre Reopening Guide is a work compiled for community theatres by community theatre people, using the best information open to us at the time. Each community theatre will have different challenges, depending on the size of its audience, the number of actors in a show, its geographical location—to name a few. We have tried to strike a balance between giving you a checklist and going through every available option. This guide is not an exhaustive list of every possible option; this guide is so you can work with your board and patrons to create the best possible scenario for your theatre.

In this guide, we've distinguished between "patrons" and "volunteers". A patron is anyone who pays to attend any kind of event at your theatre; a volunteer is anyone who works at your theatre to create a show or event, be it actors, musicians, Front of House volunteers or backstage crew.

While we acknowledge that COVID-19 is the disease and that SARS-CoV-2 is the virus, for the purposes of this document we will be using COVID-19 throughout to refer to the virus and the disease.

This is no guarantee that even if you follow everything, you won't still have someone ill. But by planning, training and implementing reasonable measures, you are protecting your theatres and inspiring patrons to return to the places where art lives.

Planning when to reopen: When it's legal and reasonably safe

Even a government directive does not mean it's time for your theatre to reopen. For instance, it may be possible for your theatre to keep the number of patrons in your space below the legal limit, but you might not be able to keep physical distancing in the lobby. How do you reopen during a highly contagious global pandemic in which even asymptomatic people can carry the disease, and most places currently lack widespread testing, contact tracing, or a vaccine?

If the first attempt at reopening is a failure, it could put any further re-openings of community theatres at risk. We must get it right and work with each other to open safely. We're all eager to get back into the theatre and bring life back to our stages, but the decision to reopen must be taken with a realistic assessment of the ability of our theatre companies to resume safely.

Patron Education

As we look towards reopening, we must work together with everyone (patrons and volunteers) to allow our theatres to open safely. Because COVID-19 is highly contagious, everyone must do their part.

Changing expectations.

In some areas, there is resistance to face coverings and physical distancing. The “new normal” needs to be accepted by all. Widespread messaging by theatre companies will ensure patrons learn that the new rules are for their protection.

What to explain.

If your theatre has a *Code of Conduct* for patrons and volunteers, consider adding the new rules. If your theatre does not have a *Code of Conduct*, consider creating one at this time with the new rules embedded in it. (See Appendix A.) Make all messaging positive, practical, and proportionate.

Where to message.

Message *everywhere*. The more people see the message, the less likely that you will have to explain further at the door. Consider including statements like “We’re putting safety first” and “We’re all in this together”.

- **Website.**
- **Social media channels.**
- **Ticket purchasing sites.** Consider adding a checkbox which patrons have to select affirming that they have read the *Code of Conduct* with the new rules and agree to comply. The *Code of Conduct* could include, for instance, physical distance and mask wearing expectations and changes in entering and exiting the house. Patrons also could be informed when they reserve tickets of the theatre’s policy “restricting people exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 and people who have come into contact with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Patrons should be advised that they will not be allowed access to the facility if they develop symptoms prior to the event”.¹
- **Emails and push notifications.**
- **Signage.** Signage should be at the front door and other high-traffic places within the theatre, including backstage, near the bar/coffee area, washrooms, and at the box office. Consider having a sign outside that provides information about COVID-19 and asking patrons/members not to enter the theater if ill, experiencing symptoms (list the symptoms), have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 14 days, required to self-isolate by Public Health, or returned from being

¹ WorkSafeBC, *Performing Arts: Protocols for Returning to Operation: General Considerations*

out of the country within the last 14 days.² Signage could convey slightly different messages depending on their location in the theatre. For instance, external signage also could include information about physical distancing, lining up or queuing instructions, mask wearing, and the use of no-touch digital thermometers if temperatures are being taken before patrons or members enter the theatre. Include the rationale for taking temperatures, that no one will be allowed entry if their temperature reading is above 38°C or 100.4°F and that an exchange or refund will be provided.³ Internal signage at the box office, bar/coffee area and washrooms could include information and instructions on safe hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. It also might be worthwhile having some information posted about the cleaning and disinfecting protocols that the theatre has undertaken. (see [Public Health Agency of Canada's Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces](#) and [Public Health Ontario Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#))

- **Volunteers.** Volunteers at the theatre should always be in compliance with the rules, model good behaviour, and provide a consistent message.

How to Message

- **Marketing.** Consider using marketing professionals to make the signs attractive and appealing.
- **Photos and videos.** Photos and videos can be beneficial in showing how actors have complied with the rules during rehearsals and how patrons are having fun at the theatre while complying with the rules. Audio-visuals also can be used to demonstrate cleaning and disinfecting measures taken by the theatre.
- **Announcements.** Any announcements before and during the show should clearly discuss what is expected of patrons and volunteers.
- **Contact Tracing.** Although Ontario is piloting a COVID-19 alert app, none yet has been launched and the time frame is unclear. In order to be able to provide contact information to Public Health should someone test positive, it is recommended that theatres maintain an attendance record of rehearsals and performances.⁴ These records should include contact information (cell phone # if possible or home phone # and email address), location in the theatre, and patron seat number. This can be kept for at least 14 days in case someone was at the theatre during that time, has been confirmed to have COVID-19 and Public Health needs the information for contact tracing. (See Appendix B for an attendance record template.)

² Both Public Health Canada and WorkSafeBC were clear that no one should be allowed entrance into the theatre if they answer “yes” to any of the questions listed.

³ Although Public Health Canada and the Federal Ministry of Health are silent on the use of temperature screening, the Event Safety Alliance and the Performing Arts Centre Consortium recommends that temperature screening be a part of the overall screening performed prior to anyone entering the theatre space.

⁴ There was not sufficient information from the printed materials about collecting names and contact information from anyone who enters the theatre during construction, rehearsals, or performances. Newfoundland/Labrador was the only source that referred to keeping a daily attendance record. However, a conversation with York Region Public Health revealed that they very much want names and contact information should someone test positive and they need to follow up.

- **Physical Distancing.** Physical distancing will become a vital component of re-opening. Theatres will need to be creative when developing a process for patrons to move in and around the theatre space and will need to convey the information to everyone who enters the space.

Health and Hygiene

Because COVID-19 is highly contagious with no vaccine, everyone must address the health risks of working in the close confines of a theatre. Air flow, physical restrictions of the space, barriers to maintaining physical distancing, and the demographics of patrons and volunteers all need to be addressed and resolved before a theatre can open safely. Theatres may want to assess their HVAC systems, and either upgrade to high efficiency filters or completely upgrade the entire system.

Infection Mitigation Coordinator. This guide recommends that a volunteer with appropriate medical and risk management knowledge be designated the “Infection Mitigation Lead” for the theatre. Although this role could be essential for safe reopening, theatres may not have a volunteer with the expertise required and will have to decide how best to oversee their COVID strategy. The Infection Mitigation Coordinator should have the following functions:

- Coordinate with, communicate, and help implement public health guidelines.
- Work closely with the board of the theatre and the producer of each show to develop and implement health safety plans.
- Help create training that applies current information and best practices about hazards and infection control measures, including social distancing, handwashing, temperature checking, and disinfecting high-touch surfaces.

Practices for Volunteers

- **Physical Distancing.** Public health guidance stresses that whenever possible, everyone should leave at least 2m between themselves and the person closest to them. If theatres experience difficulty adequate establishing physical distance or are not prepared to reopen the theatre space, they are encouraged to consider alternative to large gatherings such as live streaming, pre-recorded shows, or small concerts and if possible, to stage outdoor performances. The theatre can consider limiting the number of volunteers in any one location. Some suggestions for dealing with physical distancing include:
 - Patrons
 - Limiting the number of patrons in the theatre at one time⁵
 - Using floor decals to mark 2m
 - Using ropes, lines or stanchions to maintain physical distance
 - Virtual queuing to avoid lineups
 - Assigned arrival times, extended time between door opening and the start of the performance, or scheduled the opening of the theatre and the house at exactly the same time

⁵ The Government of Ontario’s “A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 3” states that “Audiences are subject to the number of people that can maintain physical distancing of at least two metres and cannot exceed gathering limits of 50 indoors and 100 outdoors. This applies to the entire facility, regardless of the number of theatres or performance stages within the facility” and “Performers and staff are not included in the gathering limits.”

- Assigned seating (if not already in place), blocking off seats around a patron, couple or group, leave rows empty
- Different entrances and exits for patrons and/or one-way walkways or marked off areas designated as walking areas
- Monitor lineups (if used)
- Monitor exits from the theatre (back to front, sections, call out row number, or section)
- Having shows with no intermissions but if intermissions are used, they will need to be longer to accommodate physical distancing for washrooms
- Discouraging congregation of patrons in the lobby, at the bar/coffee area or in the washrooms
- **Cast/Crew**
 - Separate entrances and exits for cast and crew
 - Actors work in bubbles, practice physical distance when they can
 - Crew wear face coverings (non-medical masks or NMM) backstage and maintain 2m distance from actors whenever they can
 - Tech or booth crew distance themselves from backstage as much as possible and wear NMM when at the theatre. If there is close contact in the booth between operators, the theatre may consider installing a plexiglass barrier between them.
 - 3-hr rehearsal periods.
 - No contact with audience before or after show
 - Maintain at least 2m between audience and actors on stage, more if possible
- **Hand Washing.** Frequent hand washing with soap is vital to help combat the spread of any virus. Everyone should wash their hands for twenty seconds at least every sixty minutes, and dry thoroughly with a disposable towel or dryer. Appropriate sanitizer may be used when a sink is not available. Hand sanitizers can be located at entry and exit points, bar/coffee area, box office, washrooms, and backstage. (See [Public Health Ontario Hand Hygiene Poster](#) and [Public Health Ontario “How to Handrub” Poster](#)) Use no-touch sanitizing dispensers if possible.
- **Gloves.** Gloves are not a substitute for regular hand washing. Anyone using gloves should be trained in proper usage and gloves should be disposed of properly. It has been recommended that gloves be used when taking money, handling POS machines or credit cards, taking tickets, handling food and beverages, temperature taking and health checks, and cleaning and disinfecting.
- **Face Coverings (NMM).** Physical respiratory protection such as a cloth face covering or NMM should be worn whenever people are within two metres (six feet) of each other. This could include box office volunteers, ticket takers or ushers, bar/coffee volunteers, volunteers taking temperatures, and crew working backstage and in the booth. Patrons should be encouraged or required to wear NMM when in the theatre. If the government directives around face masks is relaxed it may still be wise to require patrons to wear face coverings. Face covering requirements for volunteers should be task-specific and include instruction on proper use. For example, anyone doing temperature screening may need N-95 or equivalent face coverings when dealing with potentially sick volunteers or patrons.

Face shields may be considered for volunteers taking temperatures, box office (if there is no plexiglass in place), bar/coffee, and front-of-house volunteers.⁶

- **Respiratory Etiquette.** Respiratory etiquette describes a combination of measures intended to minimize the dispersion of large particle respiratory droplets to reduce virus transmission when an infected or ill person is coughing, sneezing, laughing, or talking. Individuals should cough or sneeze into a tissue, or the bend of the arm, not their hand. Tissues should be disposed of as soon as possible in a lined waste container and hand hygiene performed immediately. (See [Public Health Ontario's Respiratory Etiquette Poster](#))
- **Active Screening and Temperature Screening Protocols.** At each point of entry volunteers should conduct temperature screening using “no-touch” thermometers. Anyone displaying a temperature over 38.0 C (100.4 F) should not be allowed entry. Safety plans could include a refund policy and protocols on how to handle groups where one member is denied entry. Theatres also may choose to include a brief questionnaire, either a self-assessment web tool filled out prior to coming to the theatre or by on-site by volunteers asking questions before entrance. The questionnaire should be created in consultation with Public Health. (See [Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Questionnaire](#))
- **Box Office.** Touchless ticket options reduce the possibility of contamination. This could include print-at-home tickets, no cash, POS machines, ticket scanners, and disposable wooden stylus for POS machines.⁷ Theatres may choose to remove brochure racks and have volunteers hand brochures directly to patrons.
- **Training.** All volunteers should be trained in the COVID-19 symptoms, preventative measures, and theatre protocols. Training should include hand hygiene, the proper use of masks and gloves, and sneeze and face touching etiquette. Volunteers should have strategies for dealing with patrons who are unwilling to adhere to the theatre's protocols or unable to understand why the theatre has undertaken the steps it has. Volunteers will also require training on the safe use of cleaning products and what is required when cleaning and disinfecting the space.⁸

⁶ Both N95 masks and face shields were recommended when taking temperatures by the Event Safety Alliance. Theatres will have to decide what is best for mitigating the risk in their space and with their patron and volunteer populations.

⁷ A number of references recommended eliminating cash altogether and utilizing touchless options. Offering a wooden stylus and gloves to patrons further reduces the possibility of contamination as does disinfecting POS machines between users. *The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: For Event Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The Event Safety Alliance; Marshall, C. J. and Christian, Dionne. *Guide to Reopening Theatrical Venues (2nd Draft Edition)*. The Performing Arts Centre Consortium: Advisory Committee on Reopening: May 15, 2020; *Newfoundland/Labrador Covid-19 Guidelines for Re-Opening Theatres and Performing Arts Venues (Performance Venues) at Alert Level 2: Protocols for Returning to Operation*. Work Safe BC: July 13,2020; *Saskatchewan Movie and Live Theatre Guideline*

⁸ All references cited emphasized the importance of training volunteers on safe and correct cleaning protocols as well as proper use of masks and gloves, hand hygiene, and sneeze etiquette. Volunteers also will need instruction on what to do if they feel ill before a shift, become ill on a shift, or have a patron who reports feeling ill during a show.

- **The COVID Alert App.** It is strongly recommended that all volunteers, cast, and crew be required (if technically possible) to have the app on their personal devices. This will help in contact tracing (if needed).

Responding to Confirmed Cases

If someone is confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 and the theatre is notified, the theatre should ensure that Public Health is immediately notified.⁹

- Legal warning. It would be illegal to provide to anyone else the infected person's name or other information that could be used to determine their identity.
- Determine what areas of the theatre were visited, used, or impacted by the volunteer or patron.
- Assess whether the person's role put them within two metres of anyone else
- Work with the local health department
- If needed (Public Health may take care of this), notify impacted volunteers and patrons.

⁹ The information contained in this section came specifically from the Event Safety Alliance guide and was quite comprehensive; therefore, it was included in the plan. (Aldelman, Steven A. (ed). *The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: For Event Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The Event Safety Alliance.)

Sanitizing the Venue

Sanitizing High-Touch Areas

Regularly clean and disinfect all surfaces and objects that are touched frequently. The product used to disinfect should have an 8-number DIN and be approved by the applicable health authority. Public Health Ontario recommends cleaning and disinfecting at least twice daily¹⁰ but theatres may want to add extra cleaning and disinfecting during rehearsals and performances after consultation with their local Public Health. Public Health Canada recommends that you do not sweep or dust. Instead use a wet cloth or damp mop so as not to disturb any virus droplets.¹¹ Increase the number of waste receptacles (non-touch) near washrooms and entrances to reduce the accumulation of litter. Establish a cleaning protocol that includes high contact surfaces throughout the theatre.¹²

Public Areas (lobby, hallways, bar/coffee area)

- Door handles, handrails, push plates
- Handrails for stairs, ramps
- Light switches and thermostats
- Display cases
- Box Office counter
- Telephones, Point of Sale terminals, and other keypads
- Tables and chairs
- Beverage stations, water fountains, vending machines
- Trash receptacle touch points

Restrooms (front and back of house)

- Door handles and push plates
- Sink faucets and counters, and toilet handles
- Lids of containers for disposal of women's sanitary products
- Soap dispensers and towel dispenser handles
- Baby changing stations

¹⁰ *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Cleaning and Disinfecting for Public Settings*. Ontario Government: Ontario Public Health: March 11, 2020.

¹¹ *Community-based measures to mitigate the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Canada*. Government of Canada: Public Health Agency of Canada: May 30,2020.

¹² The list has been compiled from a few sources and covers all areas of the theatre. Individual theatres may want to amend the list to fit with their needs, and rehearsal and theatre space. (Aldelman, Steven A. (ed). *The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: For Event Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The Event Safety Alliance; *Community-based measures to mitigate the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Canada*. Government of Canada: Public Health Agency of Canada: May 30,2020; *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Cleaning and Disinfecting for Public Settings*. Ontario Government: Ontario Public Health: March 11, 2020; Marshall, C. J. and Christian, Dionne. *Guide to Reopening Theatrical Venues (2nd Draft Edition)*. The Performing Arts Centre Consortium: Advisory Committee on Reopening: May 15, 2020; *Performing Arts: Protocols for Returning to Operation*. Work Safe BC: July 13,2020; *Saskatchewan Movie and Live Theatre Guideline*.)

- Trash receptacle touch points

Back of House Offices, Dressing Areas, Green Rooms, Production Areas (including booth)

- Individual office and other room furniture
- Door handles, push plates, doorways, railings
- Light switches and thermostats
- Cabinet handles
- Telephones, computers, other keypads, mouse
- Microphones
- Headphones
- Backstage and booth technical equipment
- Trash receptacle touch points
- Seat arm rests and aisle railings in the theatre

Kitchen and Food Preparation Areas

- Handles of all kitchen equipment doors, cabinets, push pads
- Counter surfaces
- Light switches
- Handles of beverage and towel dispensers
- Handles of sinks, including handwashing sink and mop sink
- Cleaning tools and buckets
- Trash receptacle touch points

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Both cleaning and disinfecting are required since disinfecting doesn't remove dirt and cleaning doesn't eliminate germs. If possible, use a product that does both.¹³
- Cleaning removes dirt and impurities from surfaces and objects and may lower germ counts by removing but not necessarily killing them.
- Disinfecting reduces and kills germs on surfaces and objects. Because disinfecting does not necessarily clean the surface, cleaning and disinfecting are both essential.
- Cleaning Technique. Clean high-touch areas by using water and soap or cleaning solution to remove dirt and impurities from surfaces and objects, and reduce germ counts.
- Disinfecting Technique. High-touch areas should be disinfected using materials effective against COVID-19. Electrostatic disinfecting can quickly disinfect a seating area between events. Electrostatic disinfecting is a means of spraying a fine mist of positively charged disinfectant particles that adhere to surfaces and objects.¹⁴

¹³ See [Public Health Agency of Canada's Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces](#)

¹⁴ Portable electrostatic disinfecting equipment is available in Canada. The equipment varies in cost and training is provided if theatres are interested and able to afford the investment. (Aldelman, Steven A. (ed). *The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: For Event Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The Event Safety Alliance.)

- Following the Manufacturer's Instructions. In all instances, including technical and production equipment such as microphones and headphones, it is important that cleaning procedures follow the manufacturer's instructions. This will increase the likelihood of a thorough cleaning while not damaging the equipment or voiding a warranty.
- Disposal. Place gloves, used mop heads and other disposable items used for cleaning and disinfecting in a bag that can be tied before disposing of them with other waste. A separate receptacle may be chosen specifically for COVID cleaning items.
- Frequency. The frequency of cleaning high-touch areas should be determined based on the surface or object and how it is used, applying guidance from local health authorities.
- Documentation. Documenting that health and safety practices were followed at the correct intervals can help a theatre show that it behaved reasonably under its circumstances. Cleaning logs need to be carefully entered and preserved for reference. Checklists can be provided so that volunteers are clear what is required (See Appendix C for Cleaning and Sanitizing Checklist). Events that contract to use a venue should request a copy of the venue's cleaning and disinfection plan.

Entrances and Exits (Front-of-House)

Physical distancing will need to be adhered to when patrons enter and exit the theatre. It also is important to ensure an orderly entrance and reduce patron and front-of-house contact. There are various methods for ensuring an orderly process.¹⁵ These include:

- Requiring all front-of-house volunteers wear NMM and gloves when on shift.
- Placing barriers at entrances and exits such as ropes or stanchions to assist patrons with the flow of movement.
- Monitoring the flow of movement into the house by allowing a specific number of patrons in at one time. This will reduce the possibility of a backlog as patrons look for and settle in their seats.
- Limiting patron movement to designated seating area only by informing them of this when they enter the house.
- If a ticket scan is used, move the area away from the doorway to increase distancing.
- Utilize self-service program pick up and ticket drop off to eliminate patron and front-of-house volunteer contact. Eliminate program reuse practice.
- Provide disinfecting wipes to patrons to sanitize the seating area.
- Increase floor marking and aisle signage to make finding seats easier.
- Managing exits by having patrons leave according to row or section, front to back of the house. This can be done by monitoring the movement or by having the rows called out by the front-of-house person or another designated volunteer at the end of the show. Incorporate the same technique at intermission.

Food and Beverage

To maintain physical distancing and to mitigate risk as much as possible at the food and beverage counter, theatres can:¹⁶

- Establish the number of patrons who can approach the counter at one time.
- Clearly mark 2m distance requirement when in line at the counter and when approaching the counter.

¹⁵ Most of the reference sources recommended measures to ensure safe movement of patrons into and out of the house and theatre. The recommendations cited most frequently were reserved seating, visual floor markings, row and seat identification, blocking seats, and/or rows and a managed orderly exit from the house.

¹⁶ The reference sources for this section were Aldelman, Steven A. (ed). *The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: For Event Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The Event Safety Alliance; Marshall, C. J. and Christian, Dionne. *Guide to Reopening Theatrical Venues (2nd Draft Edition)*. The Performing Arts Centre Consortium: Advisory Committee on Reopening: May 15, 2020; *Performing Arts: Protocols for Returning to Operation*. Work Safe BC: July 13,2020.

- To minimize contamination at the bar/coffee area, theatres can assign one volunteer to handle the cash and others to distribute the beverages and snacks.
- Clearly identify serving and point of sale areas and distance them from each other to provide greater physical distancing between volunteers. POS terminals should be sanitized between each user and before and after each shift. Self-service or mobile pre-ordering and pay stations can limit contact and reduce the serving time.
- Provide plexiglass barriers at point of sale and between volunteers behind the counter. Alternatively, provide face shields to volunteers who are working the counter.
- If tables and chairs or café tables are used, configure them to ensure physical distancing is maintained.
- Locate and clearly identify hand sanitizing stations nearby.

Production Issues

There are a broad range of production concerns and issues that theatres will face when they re-open.¹⁷ For instance:

- Casting and auditions. If possible, theatres may want to cast remotely using virtual means. Eliminate open calls and assign arrival times. Do not allow individuals to enter the theatre until their scheduled time which can be communicated by text.
- Maintaining adequate physical distancing between actors, backstage crew and actors, and booth operators and backstage. Establish and post occupancy limits to reduce the number of people in the space at any one time. Restrict dressing rooms to single occupancy if physical distancing cannot be maintained. If physical distancing cannot be maintained backstage at any time, it is recommended that masks be worn.
- Limiting contact on stage. Consider eliminating close contact if possible (may involve removing scenes that require close contact). If closeness is required, minimize the number and duration of scenes involving close contact. Intimate and close contact scenes should be limited to body parts easily sanitized (e.g. neck kissing rather than mouth-to-mouth). If kissing cannot be eliminated, ask actors to rinse their mouths with a hydrogen peroxide-based oral rinse prior to the performance. The Government of Ontario's "A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 3" states that "Performers must maintain physical distancing of two metres from every other person, except from other performers where necessary for purposes of the performance." Please contact and inform the rights holder if scenes are going to be eliminated or changed substantially.
- Positioning musicians and/or singers to maximize physical distancing from other performers and audience members. Consider plexiglass barriers between musicians and musicians and other performers.¹⁸ Singing or playing instruments may result in a greater dispersion of droplets due to higher density breathing which requires additional steps to be taken.

¹⁷ The list of recommendations in this section primarily come from a few sources that addressed production issues directly. Rather than list separate sources for each item in the guide, they are grouped together in one note although the recommendations are varied in scope. (Aldelman, Steven A. (ed). *The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: For Event Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The Event Safety Alliance; Marshall, C. J. and Christian, Dionne. *Guide to Reopening Theatrical Venues (2nd Draft Edition)*. The Performing Arts Centre Consortium: Advisory Committee on Reopening: May 15, 2020; *Performing Arts: Newfoundland/Labrador Covid-19 Guidelines for Re-Opening Theatres and Performing Arts Venues (Performance Venues) at Alert Level 2*: June 25, 2020; *Performing Arts: Protocols for Returning to Operation*. Work Safe BC: July 13, 2020; *Saskatchewan Movie and Live Theatre Guideline*; Smaine, Darta. *The Theatre Industry in Latvia is Resuming Post COVID-19, Here's How They're Doing It*. OnStage Blog.)

¹⁸ The Government of Ontario's "A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 3" states that "Plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier is required between the audience and singers as well as players of brass or wind instruments."

- Developing a method of movement for backstage crew that reduces contact with cast. Maintaining specific “bubbles” within which cast and crew can work is recommended.
- Stagger technical set ups and checks, and rehearsals so they don’t overlap. Limit the number of volunteers during a strike. Consider staggering volunteers at different times when scheduling a strike.
- Minimize the sharing of items such as tools, equipment, props, instruments, and musical scores. If sharing cannot be avoided, establish a cleaning and disinfecting protocol before each person uses the item. If an item is shared, each person should wash his/her hands before and after using the item.
- To further mitigate against risk, theatres could require crew, director, producer, and designers to wear NMM while at the theatre. Theatres may institute some flexibility, for example, when the director gives notes.
- With the very real possibility of smaller houses, extend a run to ensure all subscribers and ticket holders can attend the production.
- Consider acquiring royalties and licences earlier than normal for all productions. With cancellations and changes, royalty houses may be extremely busy.
- Discouraging interaction between performers and audience (for example, after a show).
- Maintaining a minimum distance of 2m between performers and audience during the show, and consider increasing the distance for a musical.
- Eliminating the sharing of technical equipment. It is recommended that theatres try to reduce the number of crew using the technical equipment by maintaining the same booth operators, backstage crew, and SM throughout the production. If this is not possible but there is adequate technical equipment for each backstage and booth crew member to use, the items can be labelled to identify the person using them, stored in a plastic bag, and placed in a bin at the end of each show. If sharing of the tech equipment is unavoidable and there are not enough items for each crew member, theatres could try to reduce the number of times the items are shared by keeping the same crew on for each week during the run of the show. This will allow time between each week’s run for the headset and microphone to lie dormant. Even with disinfecting, the closeness of the equipment to the operator’s mouths adds an extra risk.
- Require all cast and crew (if technically possible) to have the COVID Alert App downloaded to their personal devices and active for contact tracing.

Emergency Exit Plan

The need for social distancing creates significant challenges when planning to evacuate a crowd during an emergency. Likewise, if patrons are to be instructed to leave the theatre in an emergency, volunteers will need training to manage the exiting crowd to avoid the risk of contagion while they flee from some other hazard. These may not be significant obstacles for the smaller crowds that may initially return to the show, but theatres may be wise to consult with Public Health regarding their emergency exit plan, especially for larger venues when they return to full houses. Note: The goal of maintaining 2m between people would become a distant secondary consideration if there is a clear and imminent danger requiring an emergency evacuation. Even during this pandemic, emergency exit plans should reflect that moving patrons away from the most urgent hazard is the first order of business.¹⁹

Selecting a Mitigation Strategy for Your Theatre

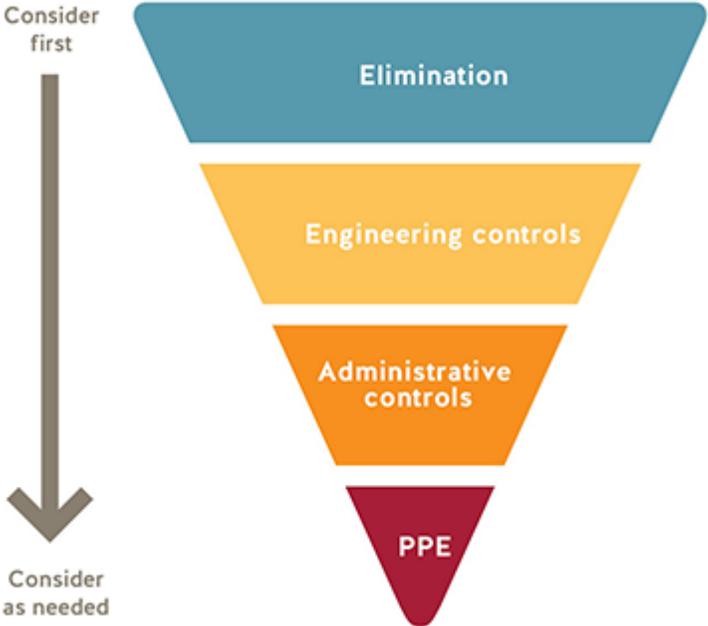
The Johns Hopkins report²⁰ proposes a Framework for Mitigation Strategies according to the familiar hierarchy of controls, adapted for COVID-19 purposes. When planning mitigation strategies, a layered approach using a combination of measures is superior to the use of individual measures and is particularly important in settings where implementation of more protective measures is not possible. Note that different protocols offer different protection.

¹⁹ Emergency Exit section has been taken directly from Aldelman, Steven A. (ed). *The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: For Event Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The Event Safety Alliance.

²⁰ This references a document put out by Johns Hopkins Centre for Health Security. Although this is specifically designed for state governors in the United States, the risk mitigation hierarchy of controls has been widely used by public health agencies in both Canada and the US. (Rivers C, Martin E, Watson C, et al. *Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors*. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Health Security: April 17, 2020.)

Wherever possible, use the protocols that offer the highest level of protection and add additional protocols as required.²¹

First level protection (elimination): Limit the number of people in your theatre when possible by establishing occupancy limits and rearranging the space to ensure that volunteers are at least 2m from other volunteers, patrons, and performers.



Second level protection (engineering controls): If you can't always maintain physical distancing, install barriers such as plexiglass to separate people and by increasing ventilation.

Third level protection (administrative controls): Establish rules and guidelines, such as cleaning and disinfecting protocols, reducing the sharing of tools and equipment, implementing one-way doors or walkways, and using technology to

facilitate communication. Provide education and training on proper handwashing technique.

Fourth level protection (PPE): If the first three levels of protection aren't enough to sufficiently mitigate the risk, institute the use of NMM. Ensure masks are selected and cared for appropriately and that volunteers are using masks correctly.

²¹ Sources: *Community-based measures to mitigate the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Canada*. Government of Canada: Public Health Agency of Canada: May 30,2020; *Performing Arts: Protocols for Returning to Operation*. Work Safe BC: July 13,2020.

Safety Plan

Provincial governments are recommending or requiring workplaces to institute a safety plan to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. Although not a requirement at this point for volunteer-driven organizations, theatres may want to be proactive and develop a Safety Plan that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. The Ontario Government has created a template for workplaces which we have adapted for community theatre use (See Appendix D for the template.)

Resources

[*A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 3*](#). Ontario Government: July 21, 2020

Aldelman, Steven A. (ed). [*The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: For Event Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#). The Event Safety Alliance.

[*Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\): Cleaning and Disinfecting for Public Settings*](#). Ontario Government: Ontario Public Health: March 11, 2020.

[*Community-based measures to mitigate the spread of coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) in Canada*](#). Government of Canada: Public Health Agency of Canada: May 30,2020.

Marshall, C. J. and Christian, Dionne. [*Guide to Reopening Theatrical Venues \(2nd Draft Edition\)*](#). The Performing Arts Centre Consortium: Advisory Committee on Reopening: May 15, 2020.

[*Newfoundland/Labrador Covid-19 Guidelines for Re-Opening Theatres and Performing Arts Venues \(Performance Venues\) at Alert Level 2*](#): June 25, 2020.

[*Performing Arts: Protocols for Returning to Operation*](#). Work Safe BC: July 13,2020.

[*Re-Opening Newmarket Business: A Playbook*](#). Newmarket Chamber of Commerce: June 2020.

Rivers C, Martin E, Watson C, et al. [*Public Health Principles for a Phased Reopening During COVID-19: Guidance for Governors*](#). Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Health Security: April 17, 2020.

[*Saskatchewan Movie and Live Theatre Guideline*](#). Government of Saskatchewan.

Smaine, Darta. [*The Theatre Industry in Latvia is Resuming Post COVID-19, Here's How They're Doing It*](#). OnStage Blog.

Appendix A: Code of Conduct

Adapted from [Soulpepper Theatre's Code of Conduct](#)

[Theatre Name] seeks continually to provide a welcoming and comfortable environment for everyone, and pledges to treat all visitors with the utmost respect and dignity. We ask that visitors reciprocate the same in their treatment of our staff, artists, volunteers, and other guests, whether in person or online.

With this in mind, discrimination or harassment of any kind, whether based on race, colour, national origin, religion, creed, gender identity, age, physical, mental or developmental disability, marital status, sexual orientation, political ideology, or any other reason, will not be tolerated. [Theatre Name] reserves the right to remove comments and/or any person who demonstrates violent, discriminatory, or harassing language and/or behavior; and to refuse admission or participation to anyone who has violated these conditions during previous activities.

As of [date], we ask that every person in the theatre (patrons, staff, artists, volunteers and other guests) adhere to all rules and bylaws regarding COVID-19 (physical distancing, wearing of masks or face coverings, handwashing, not attending the theatre if you have any symptoms, etc.). [Theatre Name] reserves the right to deny entry to anyone exhibiting symptoms.

Appendix C: “Cleaning and Sanitizing the Venue” Checklist

Sanitizing High-Touch Areas

Surfaces and objects that are touched frequently, such as the ones listed below, should be regularly cleaned and disinfected (including upon arrival and before leaving) using products approved by the applicable health authority. ALWAYS use a face mask and gloves when cleaning and sanitizing and dispose of them afterwards in the garbage.

- Public Areas (lobby-seating area around the walls, fireplace, hallways)
- All door handles, handrails, push plates
- Light switches, thermostats, and remote
- Handrails for stairs
- Box office desk, bar counter, 50/50 table
- Telephones, Point of Sale terminals
- Tables and chairs
- Trash receptacle touch points
- Washroom counter tops, sink faucets, toilet handles, soap and towel dispensers
- Kitchen counter and island top, sink faucets, and soap and towel dispensers
- Lids of containers for disposal of women’s sanitary products
- Individual office furniture (if used)
- Empty all garbage cans at end of performance or rehearsal (may designate specific garbage cans for COVID)

Back of House Space, Dressing Areas, Green Rooms, Booth

- Door handles, push plates, doorways
- Light switches and thermostats

- Telephone, monitors, TV, computers, other keypads, mouse
- ASM desks and chairs
- Microphones and headsets
- Backstage and booth technical equipment
- Trash receptacle touch points
- Back of House fridge, cabinet handles, and food preparation areas, including props tables
- Counter tops, cabinet handles and chairs in dressing rooms
- Handles of kettles and water jugs
- Washroom countertop, faucets, toilet handle, towel and soap dispensers
- Handles of backstage sink
- Cleaning tools and buckets
- All props on props table
- Empty all garbage cans at end of performance or rehearsal (may designate specific garbage cans for COVID)

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Cleaning removes dirt and impurities from surfaces and objects, and may lower germ counts by removing but not necessarily killing them. Disinfecting reduces and kills germs on surfaces and objects. Because disinfecting does not necessarily clean the surface, cleaning and disinfecting are both essential.

Cleaning Technique.

Clean high-touch areas by using water and soap or cleaning solution to remove dirt and impurities from surfaces and objects and reduce germ counts.

Disinfecting Technique.

High-touch areas should be disinfected using materials effective against COVID-19. Electrostatic disinfecting can quickly disinfect a seating area between events. Electrostatic disinfecting is a means of spraying a fine mist of positively charged disinfectant particles that adhere to surfaces and objects.

Following the Manufacturer's Instructions.

In all instances, including technical and production equipment such as microphones and headphones, it is important that cleaning procedures follow the manufacturer's instructions. This will increase the likelihood of a thorough cleaning while not damaging the equipment or voiding a warranty.

Disposal.

Place gloves and other disposable items used for cleaning and disinfecting in a bag that can be tied before disposing of them with other waste.

Frequency.

The frequency of cleaning high-touch areas should be determined based on the surface or object and how it is used, applying guidance from local health authorities.

Documentation.

Documenting that health and safety practices were followed at the correct intervals can help a business show that it behaved reasonably under its circumstances, which would be a key issue in a lawsuit. A supervisor should ensure that cleaning logs are carefully entered and preserved for reference. Events that contract to use a venue should request a copy of the venue's cleaning and disinfection plan.

Reference: *The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide: For Event Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Steven A. Adelman (ed), pgs. 9-10

Appendix D: The Government of Ontario's COVID-19 Safety Plan

Use this template to document how your organization will keep volunteers and other people safe at your theatre location during the COVID-19 pandemic. [How to develop your COVID-19 safety plan: A guide for Ontario workplaces](#) explains what you should think about and gives examples to help you come up with your plan.

Theatre details

Theatre name:

Date completed:

Division/group:

Date distributed:

Revision date:

Developed by:

Others consulted:

There are six questions in the plan. Provide as much information in response to each question as possible. This will help your volunteers, members, patrons and other people to know exactly what to do and what to expect.

The final page will help you create a snapshot version of your plan to post in your theatre. This can act as a reference for volunteers and members and let others who come into your theatre know what you are doing to help keep everyone in your theatre space safe.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an evolving situation – review your plan regularly and make changes as required. Refer to the Ontario government's [COVID-19 website](#) for up-to-date information.

1. How will you ensure all volunteers know how and are able to keep themselves safe from exposure to COVID-19?

Consider: What guidance and training will you need to provide to volunteers? How will you share information? Do you need new or more frequent types of communication? Where will you update yourself on new COVID-19 guidance?

Post updates and reminders in common areas, through emails or eblasts.

Example: Ensure our procedures are up to date by regularly reviewing Ministry of Health guidance.

Actions:

- [List your actions here. Note who is responsible for each action.]

2. How will you screen for COVID-19?

Consider: How you will stay current about what symptoms to look for? Will you use a screening checklist and/or non-touch digital thermometer? Who will do the screening and what kind of training will they require? Who needs to be screened and how often?

Post clear signage with screening questions and protocol at all entrances. Remind volunteers to use the [online COVID-19 self-assessment](#).

Example: To find out if volunteers are well when they come for their volunteer shift, we will ask each volunteer basic questions about their physical health and symptoms using the provincial list of COVID-19 symptoms. Require volunteers to call in before their shift to let the theatre know that they are not ill and show no symptoms.

Actions:

- [List your actions here. Note who is responsible for each action.]

3. How will you control the risk of transmission in your theatre?

Include how you will maximize distance and separation, reduce transmission from surfaces and objects, and support good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Consider: What engineering and administrative controls will you use? What changes will you make? Who needs to be in the theatre at any one time? How will you gather volunteer ideas about different ways of managing their responsibilities?

Use barriers, such as plexiglass, to maintain a separation when physical distancing is difficult to maintain. Update policies and procedures to include enhanced cleaning and disinfecting protocols to keep the high touch areas as free of the virus as possible. Display hand washing and hand sanitizing and sneeze etiquette posters throughout the facility.

Example: We have a new policy around cleaning and disinfecting and mask wearing, and have changed how we schedule volunteer shifts.

Actions:

- [List your actions here. Note who is responsible for each action.]

4. What will you do if there is a potential case, or suspected exposure to, COVID-19 at your organization?

There are steps that need to be taken if someone has symptoms which may be related to COVID-19, or is diagnosed with COVID-19.

Consider: What is the contact information for your local public health unit? What are your isolation procedures? How will you gather contact information for public health contact tracing?

If a volunteer informs the theatre that they are ill, has symptoms of COVID-19 or has been in close contact with symptoms have them [take the self-assessment](#). If a volunteer displays symptoms while on shift they should be advised to leave, return home, and self-isolate. Contact Public Health for guidance and follow their instructions.

Example: We have designated a safe isolation area in the theatre and created a checklist with the procedures of what to do if a member gets sick while volunteering, including key contact numbers. The checklist includes date, approximate length and frequency of the interaction, full names, contact numbers and addresses.

Actions:

- [List your actions here. Note who is responsible for each action.]

5. How will you manage any new risks caused by changes to the way you now operate?

Consider: With volunteers, review existing critical risks and whether volunteer practice changes will affect your current risk management strategy. Are any new risks introduced due to changes in volunteer numbers or volunteer practices? What new risk controls are required?

Example: We will establish regular check-ins with volunteers about how they're coping with the changes.

Actions:

- [List your actions here. Note who is responsible for each action.]

6. How will you make sure your plan is working?

Consider: How often will you schedule a review of your plan? How will you get input and ideas from members and patrons? Who is responsible for evaluating how things are working and for adapting the plan as you find better/easier ways to do things? How will you communicate changes and updates to the plan?

Example: We will ask for feedback from volunteers and patrons and the board of directors will review the feedback and the plan on a regular basis.

Actions:

- [List your actions here. Note who is responsible for each action.]

COVID-19 safety plan – snapshot

This snapshot can be posted in a place where it can be seen easily so your volunteers, members, patrons and other people entering the theatre will know what actions are being taken.

Theatre name:

Date completed:

Revision date:

Measures we're taking

How we're ensuring volunteers know how to keep themselves safe from exposure to COVID-19

- [List your measures here.]

How we're screening for COVID-19

- [List your measures here.]

How we're controlling the risk of transmission in our theatre

Physical distancing and separation

- [List your measures here.]

Cleaning

- [List your measures here.]

Other

- [List your measures here.]

What we will do if there is a potential case, or suspected exposure to, COVID-19 at our theatre

- [List your measures here.]

How we're managing any new risks caused by the changes made to the way we now operate

- [List your measures here.]

How we're making sure our plan is working

- [List your measures here.]

Appendix E: Links to Mandatory Face Coverings Signage

[City of Toronto](#)

[York Region](#)

[Durham Region](#)

[Peel Region](#)

[Simcoe Muskoka](#)