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Canadian Association of Music Therapists (CAMT)
Statement on Singing during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Music Therapy and Singing

Services performed by certified music therapists (MTA) include the clinical application of music therapy interventions within the context of a therapeutic relationship.¹ Music therapists also support access to music experiences in non-clinical settings that promote health, well-being, and quality of life for diverse persons of all ages and abilities. Typically, several of these interventions and experiences involve singing in close proximity with others.

The Current Situation

Due to concerns related to the spread of COVID-19, various provincial and regional restrictions have been placed on singing. Initially, this occurred as a result of epidemiological^{2,3} and media reports^{4,5} that labeled singing (and group singing in particular) as a “super-spreader.”^{2,6} This notion was further supported by the idea that singing creates a higher level of droplet and aerosol production as compared to speaking at a regular volume.^{7,8} If this is true, aerosol production could be particularly problematic as unlike droplets, which are visible and fall to the ground between 3-6 feet, aerosols are very small bits of fluid that can linger in the air for hours and especially in poorly ventilated indoor spaces.^{9,10} Although it is hypothesized that COVID-19 may be transmitted via droplets and aerosols, the precise mechanisms for the transmission of COVID-19 have actually not yet been determined.¹¹ “*Evidence-based practice is defined as an approach to health that integrates scientific research, patient preferences and values, and clinical expertise to make the best recommendations possible*”^{11 p. 1} The purpose of this document is to present the current state of knowledge about singing and COVID-19 and to disseminate the best possible information so that all relevant stakeholders can make informed decisions.

Benefits of Singing

There is a large and growing body of research that provides evidence on the multifaceted benefits of singing. These include: improved breathing, voice quality, and posture; positive immunological responses, improved mood, reduced feelings of stress, increased feelings of relaxation, heightened feelings of energy/vitality, cognitive stimulation/new learning, enhanced self-awareness, meaningful social and musical connections with others, feelings of belonging, sense of community connection, enhanced feelings of self-confidence/self-esteem, personal growth, and sense of life meaning/purpose.¹²⁻²¹ Many music therapy clients have labeled music therapy (and singing in particular) as a “lifeline” and this can be especially crucial for persons who are isolated or marginalized.²² Although singing via an online format can be a solution for some one-to-one sessions, this format is not always accessible and online group singing in real time is not possible due to sound latency, and when attempted, it is not always enjoyable, aesthetically pleasing, and/or the same type of social/musical experience which counteracts the benefits.

Recommendations for Singing in Music Therapy Sessions

Given current gaps in scientific evidence, we cannot say that risks potentially associated with singing can be entirely eliminated.¹¹ However, given the known benefits of singing, the importance of this activity for music therapy practice, and the possibility of significantly mitigating potential risks via appropriate pre-cautions, we offer the following recommendations based on literature cited in this article and public health guidelines.

1. **Numbers:** *limit the number of people.* The size of the clinical space and the amount of equipment and furniture should be assessed prior to sessions to allow for proper physical distancing. Small group programs should only be held based on facility guidelines and regional Public Health recommendations.^{6, 10}
2. **Duration:** *no longer than 30 minutes.* The amount of potential aerosol spread for indoor programming increases after 30 minutes.^{6, 10, 11}
3. **Masks:** *everyone should wear a mask.* Some studies and health authorities do not recommend cloth masks within health care settings; medical masks are generally recommended. If physical distancing cannot be maintained during a session a shield can be worn by the therapist along with the mask for extra protection. Shields do not replace masks and do not prevent aerosols; they only stop large droplets¹⁰. If the client is unable to wear a mask due to medical concerns the therapist should adhere to all of the listed recommendations, ensure physical distancing is maintained, and use PPE precautions such as mask and shield.^{6, 9, 11}
4. **Ventilation:** *indoor spaces should be well ventilated.* Effective environment controls (ventilation, filtration, disinfection) is recommended for slowing the spread of the virus¹⁰. Environments that do not have HVAC and filtration systems (ex. usually found in health care facilities) should adhere to the 30 minute session duration time and the opening of doors and windows when possible.^{6, 11, 23}
5. **Physical Distancing:** *all persons should be minimum 6 feet apart.* Six feet is the estimated area of projection for ballistic droplets when singing.^{6, 9, 10, 11}
6. **Frequent Hand Washing:** *conduct hand hygiene before, during, and after sessions.* Have hand sanitizer readily available in the clinic space for use by all persons in the session.^{9, 11}
7. **Cleaning Equipment and Surface Areas:** *clean thoroughly after each session.* Please follow the Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC Canada) guidelines for approved cleaning agents. The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSH) also provides recommendations for instrument cleaning. Adequate time for ventilation and cleaning of furniture and instruments is needed in between sessions (suggested minimum: 20 minutes).^{11, 24}
8. **Screening:** *all persons (therapist, client, attending caregivers, volunteers etc.) should complete a self-screening process prior to each session.* Screening guidelines should be based on regional Public Health recommendations.¹¹
9. **Public Health Guidelines:** all music therapists should adhere to their provincial and regional recommendations regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic and other public health concerns.

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