

# COVID-19 Safety Protocol for Orchestras



From the Musicians of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra FB page  
posted July 4, 2020

- Until we have universally available and accurate instantaneous testing or a vaccine to prevent infection, returning to work will involve some level of risk. A vaccine could take another year or more to develop under the best of circumstances. Unless we are willing and able to remain at home until then, we must mitigate, to the greatest extent possible, the risk involved in returning to work. Bargaining over risk mitigation will be some of the most important work we do in the coming weeks and months. The health and lives of our members will depend on it.

# Governing Principles

- **The employer is responsible for providing a safe workplace.**
  - Legal and practical reasons
  - No liability waivers
- **Employee health and safety are mandatory subjects of bargaining.**
  - Duty to bargain
  - No unilateral implementation by employer without bargaining
  - No direct dealing with musicians, bypassing union
- **Any plan for a return to work must comply with the directives of the relevant civil authorities.**
  - Returning to work for us will depend in large part on reduction in community spread.
- **Any plan for a return to work must be based on the best available science....**
  - ...which is still evolving...
  - ...so the plan may also need to evolve.
- **Musicians must have the opportunity to ratify any bargained return to work conditions and individual musicians must be allowed to choose to remain safely at home without penalty of any kind.**

# Suggestions on Process

- Close communication between OC and Local will be critical, as will communication with the bargaining unit as a whole.
- Legal framework: **Bargaining over a safety plan does not equal reopening the CBA.**
- **Who:** Consider creating a subcommittee of union reps, OC, musicians to address health and safety issues. Employer should consider engaging an accredited epidemiologist or other qualified specialist to assist in development and review of the plan, with written report to be shared with us.
- **Initiating:** Remind employer of its duties to provide a safe workplace and to bargain with the union; invite the employer to present its safety plan for our review and discussion.

- Bargaining: Gaps and deficiencies in the employer's plan should be identified and remedied. Our approach should be conservative and cautious. Err on the side of caution.
  - As you evaluate the plan, **imagine your work day, from the time you leave home to the time you return.** Think about every surface you touch and each person you interact with. Can that contact be eliminated? If not, how can the risk of transmission be minimized?
  - It may take substantial discussion and dialogue with the employer over several weeks to arrive at a completed plan that works in practice as well as theory. This should be an area where the union and the employer have shared goals.

- **Present to Bargaining Unit:** Once Local and OC are satisfied the plan is as comprehensive and protective as possible, it should be presented to the entire bargaining unit. Musician questions that cannot be answered by the Local and OC should be sent to employer by Union for answer.
  - Survey the musicians to determine their confidence in the plan as presented.
  - Go back to employer to bargain any needed changes.
- **Agreement and Ratification:** When both parties are satisfied with the plan, it should be memorialized in a **Memorandum of Agreement or Side Letter** and presented to the bargaining unit for ratification by secret ballot.

## Some Basics

1. Testing
2. Monitored entrance to hall – basic personnel only allowed
3. Questionnaire
4. Temperature check
5. Masks for everyone - microphone for conductor



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## Some Basics, pg. 2

6. Hand sanitizer available in several areas, especially where contact of surfaces is common
7. Sanitization of equipment (chairs, stands, Percussion equipment)
8. Single stands for strings
9. Plan for music distribution - safety plan for librarian(s)
10. Plexiglass barriers (at least 6 x 4 ft.)



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## Some basics, pg. 3

11. 50% capacity of hall in all areas
12. Distancing – hallways, backstage, on stage, between audience and musicians
13. Shortened services to reduce exposure
14. No breaks, or staggered restroom breaks
15. Air exchange in the hall, improved filtration
16. Add language to allow OC to review safety protocol with management at least two weeks before a production to allow changes for different venues and consideration of new COVID-19 mitigation methods.

# Sources

AFM resource:

- <https://www.afm.org/covid-19/>

AFM Symphonic Services Division resource:

- [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1c-fBlMY-QCkEKHOIo\\_b0agDzW4UcTXLq?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1c-fBlMY-QCkEKHOIo_b0agDzW4UcTXLq?usp=sharing)
- Other resources:
- <https://medicine.uiowa.edu/iowaprotocols/wind-instrument-aerosol-covid-era-covid-19-and-horns-trumpets-trombones-euphoniums-tubas-recorders>
- <https://www.nfhs.org/media/4029952/preliminary-testing-report-7-13-20.pdf>
- <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/unprecedented-international-coalition-led-by-performing-arts-organizations-to-commission-covid-19-study/#>