

Media Release, 18 March, 2021

## South Australia leads the way with dedicated COVID-19 Guidelines for Choirs

[HOW CAN WE KEEP FROM SINGING? COVID-19 Risk Management Guidance for South Australian Group Singing](#)

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*“Given what we know about the contribution that singing makes to the wellbeing of so many people, SA Health welcomes this collaboration with the Adelaide Choral Network, to promote the public health message and assist people who sing in choirs to make informed choices about how they participate”. Professor Nicola Spurrier, SA Chief Public Health Officer*

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Whilst the joyous sound of Christmas carols was largely absent from South Australia’s parks, halls and churches in 2020, Adelaide Choral Network (ACN) has today released online guidelines for choirs to make adjustments to their operations which will enable them to resume singing as safely as possible.

Written in consultation with SA Health, the online guidance provides a welcome source of clarity for choirs grappling with mixed messages from around the world about the risks of singing in large groups.

When the pandemic forced choirs into recess across the world in March last year, Adelaide Choral Network was gathering South Australia’s thousands of choristers together to plan for the 2021 Adelaide Year of the Choir, in partnership with the City of Adelaide.

Adelaide Choral Network Chair, Carl Crossin, spoke of the need to first find a pathway for choirs to resume singing before planning could continue.

“In the early days of the pandemic, social media was awash with reports from around the world of COVID-19 transmission associated with choir rehearsals and speculation about the risks was widespread.”

“Whilst we were able to postpone Year of the Choir to 2022, we needed to find a pathway for choirs to resume singing that was backed by SA Health, not only because we couldn’t continue planning with any confidence, but because the physical and mental wellbeing of choristers was affected in an immediate and tangible ways.”

“We also knew it was our responsibility, as a peak organisation in a designated UNESCO City of Music, to take the lead in making an assessment of the available science and translating it into language that would enable choirs to make their own decisions about what was best for their choristers”, he said.

With funding assistance from the State Government through Arts South Australia, Adelaide Choral Network was able to work alongside public health consultant, Rosemary Byron Scott,

to carry out a scientific examination of all the available research into the relationship between COVID-19 and singing.

The review has confirmed that there is still much that is still not fully understood, but there are nevertheless points of agreement on which useful recommendations can be made.

**The findings have informed a set of guidelines titled *How Can We Keep From Singing?*, now available online at <https://www.adchor.net.com.au/covidpage>**

**Chief Public Health Officer, Professor Nicola Spurrer has welcomed ACN's initiative and supports the recommendations.**

"Given what we know about the contribution that singing makes to the wellbeing of so many people, SA Health welcomes this collaboration with the Adelaide Choral Network, to promote the public health message and assist people who sing in choirs to make informed choices about how they participate", she said.

"We are pleased that the Guidance provides choirs with clarity between the mandatory Government requirements and additional options they can choose to adopt depending on their individual circumstances, enabling them to take responsible and practical steps to reduce the risks of spreading the virus in a group singing situation.

"This is another good example of how South Australians are working together so we can keep each other safe and continue doing the things we enjoy."

Carl Crossin is confident that the results reflect the best available information available at present.

"Adelaide Choral Network is committed to making sure South Australia's choral community can look to the future with confidence."

"We will keep abreast of changes to advice as the science develops, but in the meantime, we do our best with the information we have and encourage choirs to resume singing in a way that feels comfortable for them so that we can all participate fully in the Adelaide Year of the Choir in 2022."

### **Where to find the Guidance and Literature Review Online**

Adelaide Choral Network's Guidance for Choirs is at [www.adchor.net.com.au](http://www.adchor.net.com.au) where choirs can also register to join the network and take part in the [Adelaide Year of the Choir](#).

Go directly to the COVID pages at <https://www.adchor.net.com.au/covidpage>

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **SCIENTIFIC REVIEW MAJOR FINDINGS: FIVE POINT SUMMARY**

#### **1: Singing is not free of risk.**

Louder singing and speaking has been associated with increased emissions of airborne particles.

Our review of the literature found singing within choirs is associated with an increased risk of transmission of COVID-19, but a combination of strategies will provide the best protection from COVID-19 transmission during choir rehearsals and performances.

## **2: Agreement on types of transmission**

Although the routes of transmission in choir settings are not fully understood, there is agreement that the routes include direct person-to-person contact, and indirect transmission through droplets and aerosols and contact with object or surfaces (fomites).

Our recommendations are divided into three categories—**Ventilation** (controlling airborne particles), **Hygiene** (contact with infected surfaces) and **Physical Space** (direct person-to-person contact)—however, there is not agreement on the relative importance of each one.

## **3: Multiple Control Measures likely to be the most effective**

The scientific research surrounding singing and COVID-19 is emerging and fragmented, meaning there is not yet agreement on the risks of singing and the effectiveness of control measures.

It has emerged from the review that until further primary research specific to choir settings has been undertaken, employing as many of the control measures as possible will increase the chances that they will be effective and provide choirs in communities with low COVID-19 prevalence with the best protection from COVID-19 transmission during choir rehearsals.

In the overseas events reported, the common feature was the absence of a number of the control measures we now understand to be effective.

## **4: Ventilation**

Louder singing and speaking is associated with increased emission of aerosols and individual variability of airborne particle emission is high. We need to take aerosols seriously in a choral setting—think of them like the dissipation of incense or smoke that we can see.

Recirculated air was noted in outbreaks overseas and effective ventilation is a plausible control measure for removing infected aerosols from a space.

It is recommended that choirs work with their venues and ventilation specialists to better understand the effectiveness of ventilation systems and provide advice on airflow.

## **5: Wellbeing**

Wellbeing is an important part of the health mix and ACN encourages choirs to take the wellbeing of their participants into account when developing a COVID-safe strategy and to reflect on the effects of not being able to sing with other people.

Before COVID-19, we could only speculate on what life would be like without choir, and knowing we had a once-in-a-lifetime window to fine out, ACN put a single survey question to the network during 2020— *“Now that you’ve have time to reflect on what life is like without choir, what do you miss?”*.

The results overwhelmingly revealed that being deprived of singing with other people made a significant impact on the psychological, physical and emotional wellbeing of our choral community.

This single expression powerfully reflects the feeling of the greater network: *“Singing fills me with joy and positivity. Without singing, I am much less. I miss the physical ‘workout’ of choir – it helps keep your brain and your body fit”*.

### **How Can We Keep From Singing? Where does the title come from?**

The title is adapted from an American folksong, *How Can I Keep From Singing?* based on the text by American Baptist minister Robert Wadsworth Lowry. The song is frequently, though erroneously, cited as a traditional Quaker or Shaker hymn although Quakers adopted it as their own in the twentieth century. The original composition appears in hymnals and song collections, both in its original form and with a revised text that omits most of the explicitly Christian content and adds a verse about solidarity in the face of oppression.

There are many adaptations—not all of them choral. Here are two—the first by South Australia’s own Anne Cawrse (performed here by Adelaide Chamber Singers) and another by NYC Virtual Choir and Orchestra recorded during the pandemic in April this year.

Adelaide Chamber Singers – How Can I Keep From Singing  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7j8yHggpv0>

*Premiere performance by Adelaide Chamber Singers conducted by Carl Crossin in St Peter’s Cathedral, Adelaide, November 2015. Soloists: Emma Horwood, Alexandra Bollard, Victoria Coxhill, Charlie Kelso, Courtney Day, Christie Anderson, Brooke Window, Cassandra Humble, Rachel Bruerville & Andrew Linn. Commissioned by Adelaide Chamber Singers Supporters Fund for ACS’ 30th anniversary celebrations and subsequently nominated for the Australian Music Centre’s “2016 Vocal/Choral Work of the Year” award. Audio recording by ABC, video and editing by Curtis Brownjohn Films*

New York City Virtual Choir and Orchestra:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLPP3XmYxXg>