

New COVID-19 Community Levels Framework Updated Guidance for the Performing Arts

Issued March 21, 2022

The CDC’s COVID-19 Community Levels Framework is a new tool to help communities decide which prevention steps to take based on the latest data. Levels can be low, medium, or high based on the number of hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in the area. This Updated Guidance for the Performing Arts is based on our Expert Medical Advisory Board’s assessment of these guidelines and the continuing unique risks that COVID-19 poses for our Members.

Whether directing, choreographing, acting, or singing, the theatrical labor force faces special challenges in their workplaces. The dropping of mask requirements will likely increase the risk to artists from unmasked audiences, as will daily encounters with unmasked individuals in retail and grocery stores, schools, houses of worship, and other community events. By now, we also know that the SARS-CoV-2 virus will continue to mutate. The severity of disease, transmissibility, and immune avoidance associated with any future variants cannot be predicted. The metrics that justify the CDC’s reductions in community controls, therefore, must be monitored continually and may warrant reinstating controls if or when the risk to our Members increases again.

Based on these realities, our Expert Medical Advisory Board recommends a cautious and incremental approach to lifting proven safeguards. Leveraging the new CDC Community Risk Levels Framework while maintaining some layers of additional controls (vaccines, testing, ventilation, mask use, and physical distancing) will help keep our Members working safely.

New Cases <small>(per 100,000 population in the last 7 days)</small>	Indicators	Low	Medium	High
Fewer than 200	New COVID-19 hospital admissions per 100,000 population (7-day total)	<10.0	10.0-19.9	≥20.0
	Percent of staffed inpatient hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients (7-day average)	<10.0%	10.0-14.9%	≥15.0%
200 or more	New COVID-19 hospital admissions per 100,000 population (7-day total)	NA	<10.0	≥10.0
	Percent of staffed inpatient hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients (7-day average)	NA	<10.0%	≥10.0%

The CDC’s new metrics for assessing community risk uses three indicators: new cases, new COVID-19 hospital admissions, and the percentage of hospital beds filled by COVID-19 patients. The CDC will be updating data for every county in the US and making the risk level for each county available on this site: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>.

Additional Controls for Performing Artists

When the community risk, as shown in the chart above, is decreasing from “high” to “medium” or “medium” to “low,” the higher-level controls, as shown in the chart below, should be maintained for at least 2 weeks before changing to a lower level. When there are any signs of worsening of community risk (from “low” to “medium” or “medium” to “high”), reinstate higher-level controls as soon as the risk level changes. In addition, please follow the additional guidelines below.

Mitigation Controls	Low	Medium	High
Vaccines	COVID-19 vaccines and boosters strongly recommended.	COVID-19 vaccines and boosters strongly recommended.	COVID-19 vaccines and boosters strongly recommended.
	If less than 80% of the organization is fully vaccinated and boosted (if eligible), then increase other controls such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased surveillance testing • Masks for rehearsals +/- performances • Enhance the ventilation 		
Ventilation	Meet ventilation standards per AGMA/SDC Playbook.	Meet ventilation standards per AGMA/SDC Playbook. Improve ventilation for high-risk situations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased % fresh air mix • Increased MERV filtration to greater than MERV 13+ • Increased air changes per hour • Additional HEPA scrubbers • In-duct cleaners e.g., UV 	
Masks	Masks optional for fully vaccinated individuals but strongly recommended for artists seated in audience during previews if audiences are unmasked and/or of unknown vaccination status. If less than 80% of the organization is fully vaccinated and boosted (if eligible), masks are required for all in rehearsals and performance except performers while actively rehearsing or performing.	Masks required for all employees in rehearsals and performance except performers while actively rehearsing or performing. Recommend use of higher-grade masks (KN95, N95, KF94).	Masks required for all employees in rehearsals. Masks required for all employees during performances. If performers remove masks while actively performing, increased testing or enhanced ventilation is required. Use higher-grade masks (KN95, N95, KF94)
Physical Distancing	Not required	Optional/where feasible	Per AGMA/SDC Playbook
Pre-Employment Testing	Required testing for all company members: PCR (72 hours) or Rapid Antigen (4 hours) prior to start of work.		

Mitigation Controls (continued)	Low	Medium	High
Surveillance Testing	Optional for 100% fully vaccinated companies. Recommended 2x per week surveillance testing for any unvaccinated individuals if less than 80% of the company is fully vaccinated and boosted (if eligible).	Surveillance testing 2x per week for all employees.	Surveillance testing 3x per week for all employees. If masks will be removed for performances: testing <u>every</u> workday for unvaccinated, partially vaccinated, and those who are not eligible for a booster or who are immunocompromised.
Contact Tracing	Maintain	Maintain	Maintain
Symptom Checking	Maintain	Maintain	Maintain

Task/Situation Guidance			
	Low	Medium	High
Auditions	No restrictions	In-person auditions allowed. PCR testing within 48 hours or Rapid Antigen testing within 4 hours.	As per AGMA/SDC Playbook. Remote auditions where possible. PCR testing within 48 hours or Rapid Antigen testing within 4 hours.
Make Up and Costume	Masks not required if performer and makeup and hair stylists are fully vaccinated and boosted (if eligible). If not, everyone wears a mask except the performer when face makeup is being applied or hair is being styled.	Everyone wears a mask except the performer when face makeup is being applied or hair is being styled.	Everyone wears a mask except the performer when face makeup is being applied or hair is being styled.
Intimate Scenes	Rapid antigen testing of those involved 2-4 hours prior to the performance is recommended.		Minimize or perform in a non-touch manner. Testing as per "low" and "medium."
Children	Fully vaccinated children follow rules for fully vaccinated adults. Un/partially vaccinated children maintain mask wearing except for performances and must participate in surveillance testing per above.		Only engaging fully vaccinated children is recommended – follow adult requirements.
Touring Companies	Working from multiple locations brings with it uncertainties (venue ventilation capabilities, venue staff vaccination status, and other controls). Hotel living and use of public transportation may also increase risk. It is therefore recommended that a cautious approach be adopted and either operate at one level higher than the venue's county designation or require location to be at a certain risk level or lower for 4 weeks before adopting that level of controls.		

Additional Recommendations for Vulnerable Employees

For employees who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease:

- Consider more flexible work options if feasible.
- Provide access to rapid testing if needed either via at-home tests or other easy access testing.
- Make sure vulnerable employees know they should talk with their healthcare providers about oral antivirals, monoclonal antibodies, and PrEP (preventative treatment) (e.g., Evusheld)

As always, our goal is the safety and success of our artists. Any proposed changes to existing safety protocols must be reviewed and discussed with SDC prior to implementation. We thank our Members and employers for their patience and collaboration as we continue to make our workplaces safe during these challenging times.