



West Midlands Brass Academy

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COVID-19 risk assessment for teaching

Teaching in a student's home

Hazards

- Coughing/sneezing droplets
- Speaking or breathing – aerosols
- Contact with infected person or surface including saliva blown out through water key

Risk

COVID-19 is a highly contagious virus and although many people may not suffer severe symptoms, or even show any symptoms at all, it can be very dangerous to some people. Because it is difficult to assess the likelihood of infection it is assumed that in the one to one teaching arena there is a high risk of circulating the disease. Teaching in small rooms with inadequate ventilation increases the risk as droplets and aerosols are contained and aerosols particularly can stay in the air for some time. There is also a risk of contaminated surfaces where the virus can survive for a couple of days in some circumstances including releasing saliva from the water key.

When teaching in students houses there may also be other people around who may be infected without being aware of it.

Control measures

Social distancing

Social distancing is one of the most effective ways of controlling transmission and teacher and student should ideally keep to at least a 2-metre distance between them if possible. If it is possible then teaching outside should be considered as it has been shown that transmission is significantly reduced during outside activities.

Ventilation

There is some evidence that transmission is also reduced by air circulated in and out of the room. Teaching should not take place in a sealed room, particularly with air conditioning, and suitable airflow should be created by opening windows if possible, although this may be difficult in winter or bad weather.

Entry and exit

Where possible the teaching room should be as close to the entry door as possible to reduce the amount of the building the teacher needs to go through and the time in the house should be kept to a minimum.

Sharing equipment

Under no circumstances should equipment be shared, particularly instruments or mouthpieces. In addition the teacher should have copies of all the music so that they do not have to go too near the student to look at what is being played.

Cleaning

Any equipment and teaching spaces should be thoroughly cleaned before the teacher arrives and the lesson starts. There will be an element of trust with this and as this will need to have been done before the teacher arrives it will be up to the teacher to assess if this has been done satisfactorily.

Water

It is the responsibility of the student to clear up any water from the instrument and they should provide a cloth or towel for that purpose which should be washed after the lesson. The teacher should have no contact with the cloth.

Teaching at the teacher's home

Teaching at home carries similar risks to teaching in student's homes although managing the risks teaching at home are under the control of the teacher.

Hazards

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- Speaking or breathing – aerosols
- Contact with infected person or surface including saliva blown out through water key

Risk

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Control measures

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Ventilation

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Entry and exit

Where possible the teaching room should be as close to the entry door as possible to reduce the amount of the building the student needs to go through and the time in the house should be kept to a minimum. Only the student should enter the property for the lesson.

Sharing equipment

Under no circumstances should equipment be shared, particularly instruments or mouthpieces. The teacher should have copies of all the music so that they do not have to go too near the student to look at what is being played.

Cleaning

Any equipment and teaching spaces should be thoroughly cleaned before and after the lesson and the student should be notified that this has happened, particular attention should be given to areas where water has been emptied from the instrument (see below).

Water

It is the responsibility of the student to provide any cloths or towels for when emptying the water in the instrument and they should take it away and dispose of it after the lesson. The teacher should have no contact with the cloth.

Personal Protective Equipment

It is difficult to see how PPE could help, the student would be unable to wear a face mask. There is much debate about the effectiveness of face masks on the transmission of the disease, but they are undoubtedly a reminder that the virus is still with us and have a psychological effect on both the wearer and others. The teacher may feel they need to wear a face covering, but they must be aware that they may not help with the transmission. Perspex screens and visors may provide some protection from droplets in the air but would be ineffective against aerosols.

Conclusion

This is a difficult issue, but it is apparent that there are significant risks when mixing with people from outside of your household. The risks are outlined in this document but there is some debate and uncertainty about how significant brass instruments (along with singing and Woodwind instruments) are in spreading the disease. Public Health England are currently undertaking studies and until they have been concluded and published the uncertainty will continue. However, any recommendations they make will probably have little impact on the risks attached to music teaching outlined here.

It is clear that there are significant risks when teaching one to one in either scenario, and it needs a judgement about the risks against the practicality of measures that would need to be taken. There are also no perfect teaching venues, and in many it would be difficult to operate social distancing even at 2 metres, and whether the ventilation in those venues is also adequate, particularly in adverse weather conditions.

It is doubtful whether PPE could be of much use while teaching face to face so control measures such as social distancing and regular cleaning will be relied upon to prevent transmission and as has been outlined social distancing in many instances will not be possible.

By far the safest way of teaching is online but although there are probably some marginal benefits to teaching face to face, the practicalities of making teaching venues safe makes it difficult to return to face to face teaching in the short term; although that should be the aim as soon as it is safe to do so.

Therefore after careful consideration I am intending to continue teaching online for the Autumn term. This will, of course, be reviewed on a regular basis and reassessed when government guidance or circumstances change.

Chris License