

Recommendation for indoor congregation singing, risk mitigation

As of July 2021, the best science and expert recommendations available to the Greater Northwest Area COVID-19 Response Team continue to urge caution regarding singing, especially indoor congregational singing.

Recognizing both the importance of singing for many and the prolonged nature of this pandemic, we are providing the following guidance to churches and ministries in Option 2. **Churches operating under Option 1 may not engage in indoor congregational singing at this time.** In providing this guidance, we remove the final restriction included in “[Stepping Forward...](#)” for Option 2 ministries, provided local churches and ministries safely move forward with an abundance of caution and love for their neighbors.

While ‘safe’ is a word many are rightfully reluctant to use amid a pandemic, we believe the following guidance is both cautious and reflective of our Wesleyan desire to do no harm. Even as we deliver this promised update, we continue to be troubled by the selfish, self-destructive lack of concern among a vocal minority. We remain thankful for the many clergy and lay leaders who continue to use creativity and hard-earned technological ability to meet the spiritual needs of those in their care safely.



After much discussion and consideration of options, the GNW COVID-19 Response Team settled on using the “[daily new cases per 100k](#)” metric as provided by [CovidActNow](#) as the indoor congregational singing threshold for ministries operating in Option 2. While no metric should be looked at in complete isolation, the new daily case count offers a straightforward measure for assessing community-based risk. While we have and continue to discuss the impact of vaccination rates, for now, the best indicator of public risk remains the case rate, not the vaccination rate.

For churches using this singing guidance, we recommend checking this metric weekly to ascertain the best plan for that week’s events. We suggest choosing a day midweek and maintaining consistency as to when you check. Some movement in your county’s risk level should be expected, especially as we wait to see the extent of Delta’s impact upon our communities.

County-based CovidActNow data is now available to view along with the following recommendations on the [Greater Northwest Area website](#). Select your county, and updated guidance on singing will appear in addition to other metrics.

The following recommendation, applicable only to Option 2 churches, may be adjusted in the future as we learn more about the impact of COVID-19 variants and the resiliency of communities with a high rate of vaccination.

Indoor Congregational Singing Under Option 2

TIER 4 - Daily new case rate greater than 10, per 100k

- No live singing indoors. Soloists and ensemble groups may gather for the safe recording of music to support online or hybrid worship.

TIER 3 – Daily new case rate greater than 5 but no greater than 10, per 100k

- Live solo and ensemble groups allowed with mitigation practices in place. No indoor congregational singing allowed.

TIER 2 – Daily new case rate greater than 1 but no greater than 5, per 100k

- Indoors congregational, solo and ensemble singing allowed with mitigation practices in place.

TIER 1 - Daily new case rate no more than 1, per 100k

- Ministries can engage in congregational singing with no limitations beyond those recommended by the CDC and state and local public health authorities.

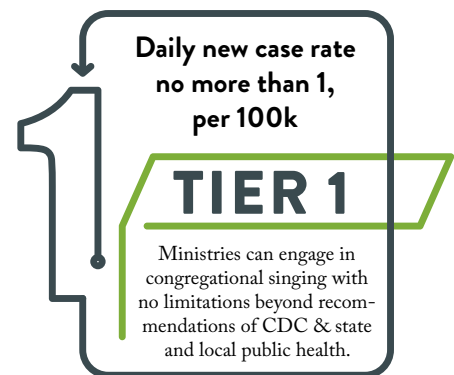
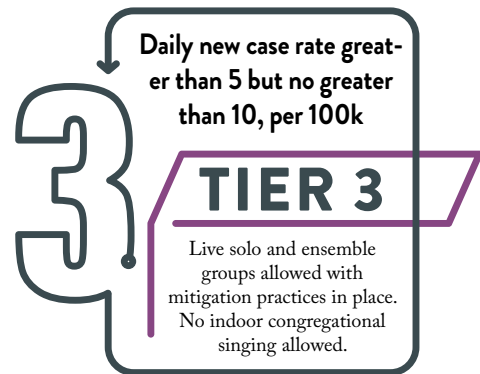
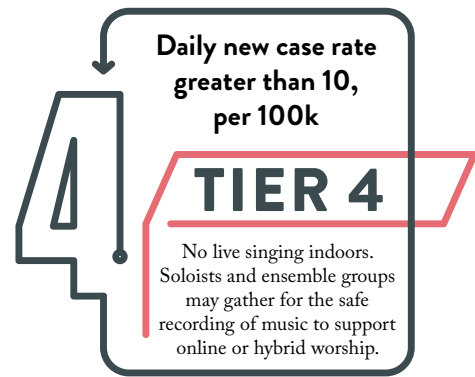
We remind you that ministries are always invited to move more cautiously. Leaders are encouraged to consult with soloists and ensemble members to plan collaboratively and creatively to honor the musical gifts people offer and hold space for those who are more vulnerable and/or risk-prone.

Risk Mitigation

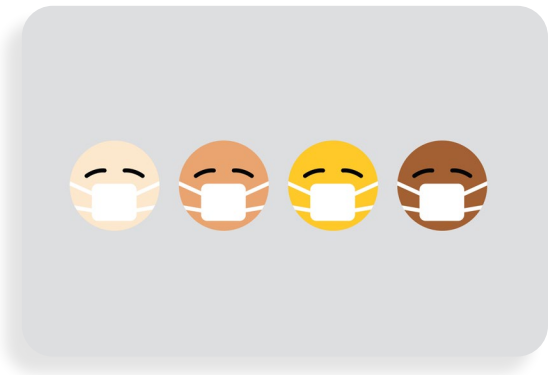
While it may be tempting to look at risk mitigation strategies as a buffet of choices, a growing understanding of COVID-19 and how it spreads tells us that these practices are not equal in impact and are most impactful when practiced in unison.

Except for Tier 1, we expect risk mitigation beyond that specified by the CDC to be in place whenever there is singing. Even within this tier, we expect ministries to follow guidance from the CDC and local and state public health authorities.

When we discuss risk mitigation, we are referring to the following strategies:



- **Masking** – Especially with congregational singing, we recommend that 100% of the congregation wears masks regardless of vaccination status until daily new cases drop below 1 in 100k. Masking is one of the most effective methods at our disposal.
- **Distancing** – Six feet of physical distance between family groups. For those utilizing soloists and ensemble groups, use further distancing of at least 12 feet¹ between musicians and congregants.
- **Duration** – Schedule no more than ten minutes of congregational singing per indoor service and weight its placement in the order of worship toward the service’s end. Plan for the time in the space to be no longer than one hour, preferably 45 minutes or less.
- **Air Changes** – No two spaces are alike, but larger areas are better than smaller ones. Open doors and windows to the outside and recirculating air through a system with a filter with a MERV rating of 13 or higher can help, but it is best to consult with an HVAC professional to assess your space and options.
- **Vaccination** – Confirming the vaccination status of worship leadership (pastor, liturgists) and musicians, particularly vocalists, is a valuable risk mitigation strategy. Especially if any of the aforementioned remove their masks during worship, vaccination should be a requirement.
- **Surface Cleaning and Personal Hygiene** – Remaining attentive to cleaning high-traffic surfaces and encouraging strong personal hygiene are good risk mitigation practices to maintain. Understanding as we do now that COVID-19 is primarily transmitted through airborne particles, ministries should not believe these are effective in isolation or instead of risk mitigation efforts like masking and attention to a space’s air.



¹ For example, in June [the CDC released a study](#) where a choir member infected a dozen congregants despite being more than 15 feet distanced. Other mitigation efforts were not in place which may have made a difference.