



Doing things safely - to reduce Covid risks

From 19 July, the Centre is open again for a full range of activities

Recent government announcements on Covid controls (relating to England) mean most of the legal requirements on matters like face-coverings, social distancing, maximum numbers of people in one place, etc, have been lifted from 19 July 2021.

The emphasis is on individuals being expected to act responsibly and sensibly.

What the Community Centre is doing to help keep users safe

- We will keep in place all our basics of good anti-Covid sanitation and cleaning.
- We will continue using signage that guides people to follow particular routes around the communal areas of the Centre (such as a one-way entrance-exit route in the Café).
- We will ensure that communal areas are kept well ventilated, through natural air flow.

Requests and advice to our users

We're asking all our users to continue taking sensible precautions for their own protection and for other people's protection too.

When you are in the communal areas, we ask you to make use of the hand sanitisers, follow marked routes, and wear a face covering (except when you have taken a seat in the Café).

When you have left the communal areas, and are in the rooms and spaces hired for activities, it's for the organisers of the activities to decide the arrangements for conducting things safely.

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Suggested general guidance, for organisers of meetings and activities

Identifying risks

Many users will have already conducted a **risk assessment** of holding their activities, from the periods in 2020 which were not subject to 'lockdown'. You may find it useful to review that assessment now - or carry out a new assessment to take account of the rather different circumstances today.

Deciding how to organise the activity in the space you have hired it for

Individuals attending your meeting or activity may have their own expectations (and anxieties) about what feels to them, these days, like a safe setting to be in. Many people have become more sensitive to places "feeling crowded".

There is a list of Community Centre rooms which sets out a recommended 'normal' capacity for each space ... <https://www.southwickcommunitycentre.org.uk/sccroomsizes2019.pdf> ... but that is based on a 'lecture' or 'theatre' layout - and of course a 'boardroom' layout (around a table) always means a smaller capacity. We suggest you take a view on what the *participants* in your activity will feel comfortable with, in terms of the layout and the overall numbers attending.

Asking people to follow certain behaviours

Of course, if organisers become aware that a person may have signs of Covid symptoms, they should require them not to take part but to return home immediately.

But there are other matters that attendees can be asked to bear in mind, when they are invited to a meeting or activity. For example, legally there is now a choice about wearing a face covering or not - but if most of your members prefer the wearing of a face covering at a meeting or activity, you are perfectly entitled to make that known to all the people who are thinking about attending.

Thinking about fresh air

Good ventilation has emerged as a significant factor in reducing transmission of the virus in indoor settings. Many users of the Centre may have been accustomed to meetings held with the doors closed. But stuffy rooms with limited circulation of air can add to the risk of Covid transmission. We encourage our users to open doors and windows sufficiently for it to feel that air is able to circulate and flow in and out of the room.

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The Barn Theatre - additional suggestions specifically for organisers of theatre and concert performances in the Barn

Identifying risks

There are detailed guides and materials available from the professional sector - for example, this compilation from the Association of British Theatre Technicians ...

<https://www.abtt.org.uk/resources-guidance/covid19/back-to-work-working-safely/>

However, the Barn Theatre is a relatively small venue that is mainly used by a relatively few, non-professional performing groups which are very familiar with the space and its features. There is a great deal of shared knowledge among these groups that can be used to home-in on the most relevant areas for action on Covid safety.

And there is a well-established volunteer committee (the Barn Management Committee) where this expertise can be shared and where best practice can be agreed. So this 'Barn' guidance note may be updated to reflect such developments.

Selling a production to customers

An important factor is the initial decision on audience capacity and seating layout. Legally, it's no longer necessary to use the very 'spaced' arrangements that were required at the previous stage of Covid restrictions. Nevertheless, promoters of performances at the Barn will want to take account of the feelings and expectations of their potential audience members - and the likelihood (in these early days of 'freedom') that many of them may be anxious about an audience set-up that "feels crowded".

At this early stage of recovery, organisers of a production may therefore wish to consider a seating layout that offers the opportunity of more "aisle seats" for example - and one that generally may add up to a somewhat smaller "full capacity" than in pre-Covid times.

Advance communication with customers

Whether through the Barn's own Box Office, or independently, production organisers will of course want to let their customers know what to expect when they come to a performance. Whatever the decisions made by the organiser, it will help customers to know there will be an expectation that - for example - face coverings may be encouraged at some stage of arriving, or that one-way systems may be in place, or that purchases (of programmes, refreshments, etc) may be preferred using 'contactless' payment methods instead of cash.

Communication 'messaging' at the performance

The most effective communication will almost certainly be the information given in person by the box-office and front-of-house volunteers. Which means of course that the volunteers will need to be properly briefed to get the necessary messages across to the customers.

If you wish to reinforce certain messages with signage, the Community Centre Office may be able to advise you on the sourcing of ready-made notices.

Working the actual front-of-house space

Depending on the specifics of the production, there will be choices about the routes of public entrance and exit (into and out of the Barn auditorium) that offer the safest circulation of audience members. It would be advisable to discuss this, well in advance, with the volunteers in the Barn Box Office and the Front of House Team. (See below for more about "coordination with the Bar".)

Protecting volunteers

There is plenty of good-practice material helping to address how to keep performers and production members as safe as possible against Covid risks. See, for example, this from NODA ...

https://www.noda.org.uk/assets/ckfinder_library/files/Factsheets/Nodasafe%20-%20Back%20to%20the%20Stage%20Considerations%20for%20Covid%2019.pdf

But it needs some good judgement - specific to the production - about how best to safeguard the **volunteers** at the Barn Theatre who welcome customers, check their tickets, sell them programmes and refreshments, guide them to their seats, etc.

For example, decisions will be needed about the wearing of face coverings - in consideration of the safety of the volunteers: in what situations might “masking-up” be requested of customers inside the Barn foyer and the Barn auditorium? There may be several other issues of this kind, for the protection of volunteers, that need to be decided for the production.

We suggest a guiding principle - to respect the wishes of volunteers who may themselves wish to exercise caution. It needs to be clear what the volunteer role means - in terms not only of the usual theatre tasks, but also of contact, social distancing, etc. It's a volunteer's choice whether or not to wear a mask - but you may wish to encourage volunteers to do so.

Thinking about fresh air

The Barn stage and auditorium are tall spaces and the volume of the interior is large. But the same principle of good ventilation applies here as in smaller 'room' environments.

There are various ways of achieving a natural flow of air in the hall, at ground level, from various doorways that can be left open or partly open. There is no single right answer - the circumstances will differ for each production. We encourage production organisers to 'trial' the options in advance of the event.

Coordination with “the Bar”

Arrangements for the Café-Bar area are the responsibility of the Community Association, who will set the guidance for use of that area and for the operation of the Café and Bar team.

People attending a performance may of course wish to move between that area and the Barn auditorium. There will therefore need to be good coordination before the production to establish, for example, the preferred routes to be used by audience members between the two spaces (to ease queuing, crowding and “pinch-points”).

We ask production organisers to establish a clear and agreed plan for this, before the event.

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