

# COVID-19 Update: May 2023

Hello OIGC Community:

I am writing today to provide you with an update on OIGC's protocols and policies regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. As you may have heard, on May 11, 2023, the federal government declared a conclusion of the Public Health Emergency related to COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released new guidance on this topic, which you can find in detail on their website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). We encourage everyone to visit this website and familiarize yourself with the comprehensive information provided.

When the pandemic started back in 2020, our primary concern was a) keeping our community *safe*, and b) keeping our community *together*. A choir is made up of individual people coming together in harmony – in order to “come back *after*” we needed to be sure we had something to “come back *to*.” I am profoundly grateful for each singer's participation and support of these protocols over the past 3 years – thank you, all, for “**caring on the side of caution.**” While this message outlines protocol changes, that motto remains our North Star.

The CDC's guidance covers the transition from pandemic response to routine public health practices, changes in testing and vaccination protocols, and the ongoing need for precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It emphasizes the importance of **remaining proactive** in protecting ourselves and others, even as we see progress in our collective efforts. As an institution, OIGC's commitment to your health and safety remains unwavering.

## **What does the end of the Public Health Emergency mean for individuals? The CDC shares the following:**

- **Vaccines and masks remain effective and available.** Vaccines and masks continue to play a crucial role in curbing the spread of COVID-19, and the new guidance highlights the importance of getting vaccinated and staying up-to-date with any booster shot recommendations.
- **Testing remains critical.** Free at-home tests may no longer be easily accessible. OIGC plans to continue stocking COVID tests for use as needed. We encourage singers to obtain free tests from your medical provider whenever they're offered to have on hand when needed.
- **Treatments remain available.** While not everyone is eligible, medications such as Paxlovid will remain free while available. Check with your healthcare provider.
- **National Reporting may change.** Case count numbers are already skewed by the lack of self-reporting of at-home positive test results. This means we each need to be attentive to what we see happening in our own community – a “surge” may occur, but not be reportable by data.
- **Isolation remains an effective tool for spread prevention.** The current CDC guidelines on isolation are detailed on the following print-able one-pager, [How To Protect Yourself and Others \(cdc.gov\)](http://www.cdc.gov), and as follows:
  - Isolate if suspected/confirmed instance of COVID-19 and related symptoms.
  - Vaccination status does NOT exempt from isolation.
  - Isolate until negative test results, if symptomatic. At least 5 days if positive, no symptoms. Duration varies based on symptoms. Continue precautions until day 11.
  - Stay home, use separate bathroom, improve ventilation.
  - Wear a high-quality mask around others. Avoid non-masked travel and crowded places.
  - Monitor symptoms, seek care as needed.
  - Consult a healthcare provider for severe illness or weakened immune system.
  - Utilize antigen tests before mask removal. Positive antigen tests may require continued precautions.

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**How do these changes affect our institution's protocols? OIGC will move forward as follows:**

- OIGC *strongly encourages* all singers to be **fully vaccinated and boosted**. As of this message, vaccination/booster status submission is no longer compulsory.
- OIGC will continue to *strongly recommend* **wearing well-fitted masks** during rehearsals and performances. As mask mandates have been lifted, we will no longer enforce mandatory masking. We recognize individuals may prefer to remain masked. A black singers mask is a welcome addition to any performance uniform.
- OIGC requests you please continue to **notify us** ([health@oigc.org](mailto:health@oigc.org)) if you test positive **within 48 hours** of participating in any OIGC activity. We continue to *care on the side of caution*, and it is important people have an opportunity to know about potential exposure. We will continue to maintain discretion in communications.
- OIGC will continue to collect attendance information, to comply with our regular performance policies.
- OIGC will continue to provide opportunities for social distancing at in-person rehearsal spaces. ZOOM-accessible rehearsals have resumed for OIGC *only*. Minimum in-person requirements still apply, per the Singer Handbook.
- Executive Staff will continue to monitor the public health environment. We will communicate and adjust these protocols as appropriate.

The past several years have been full of challenges. These are difficult decisions. I know some of us have been ready to see these sorts of changes for months, and others of us aren't ready for them yet. OIGC has taken it slow because we know it is much harder to reinstate mandates like these in the future than it is to roll them back. But, it is also important that we consistently enforce any policies we put in place.

We recognize that it is not practical or enforceable for us to retain our pandemic-era protocols indefinitely. These changes are consistent with current community standards and CDC guidelines, as the World Health Organization and other public health agencies downgrade COVID-19 to endemic status.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly.

Warmly,

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