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Dear Parents and Musicians,

As you are aware, under the most recent revisions in the Pandemic Framework, Halton has moved in to “red” or “control” zone. This changes the way in which we must conduct ourselves during this pandemic.

Official Public Health Guidance from Halton Region

In the Red/Control zone, rehearsals are permitted with physical distancing and screening with a clear safety plan. Officially, we meet these requirements.

Other important considerations

In providing advice to the Board as one of the members, I have considered several other important factors:

1. The Public Health Ontario recommendations were more stringent than those adopted by the provincial framework. This has been covered by various media outlets and confirmed by several public health physicians in the media.
2. At this time, Halton’s test positivity rate is approximately 4.4% and the weekly incidence rate is approximately 65 cases per one hundred thousand population and growing. These numbers are concerning because most cases do not have a known source of transmission.
3. Bordering Public Health Units have now openly declared that they are no longer able to manage timely contact tracing or test positive notifications (Toronto, Peel, and Hamilton). This means that individuals who come to rehearsal will not necessarily know if they were in contact with a positive case in a timely fashion. Some patients are being notified by phone up to 4 or more days about a positive test result if they are unable to access it themselves. If people do not know their exposure history, they cannot safely gather.
4. Given the rising hospitalizations and the burden on the healthcare system in general, I believe schools are at risk of closing if more significant measures are not taken rapidly. Some private schools are voluntarily shifting to online only for a prolonged holiday break. Due to overwhelming pressures on the healthcare system, a regional command table has been struck to share acute care beds in the Greater Toronto Area because some hospital systems are already beyond capacity. This was not required in Wave 1. By both current epidemiologic data and historical experience, Wave 2 is expected to be worse than Wave 1.

Recommendation

Given this, I have made a recommendation to the board to take a conservative approach now. My recommendation is to transition to a full virtual rehearsal effective December 1. This decision will be monitored and reassessed over the following weeks. We anticipate the likelihood of cases going down before Christmas is relatively low and OSYO should be planning for virtual rehearsals into early January if needed.

In pandemic times, we need to act in the face of data. Dr. Michael Ryan of the World Health Organization has often been quoted saying “If you need to be right before you move, you will never win.” I recommend we act now. I appreciate this is difficult and if you have questions about anything I have said, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Wash your hands. Wear a mask inside. No unnecessary activity outside the home. Physically distance. Stay safe.

Kind regards,

Andrew