

# **Statement on Audience Management in Concert and Opera Houses During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Prof. Dr. med. Stefan N. Willich, MPH MBA, Priv.-Doz. Dr. med. Anne Berghöfer,  
Institut für Sozialmedizin, Epidemiologie und Gesundheitsökonomie, Charité -  
Universitätsmedizin Berlin

Dr. med. Miriam Wiese-Posselt, MPH, Prof. Dr. med. Petra Gastmeier,  
Institut für Hygiene und Umweltmedizin, Charité - Universitätsmedizin Berlin

Note from the authors:

The statement refers to the safety of the audience and employees and is intended to enable the concert operation during the COVID-19 pandemic. When implementing our recommendations, further epidemiological developments as well as new research results may have to be taken into account.

## **Background**

The spread of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 since December 2019 has reached the dimensions of a global pandemic. Measures to contain the infection have led to severe restrictions on public life and individual freedom of movement in many countries.

In Germany, the restrictions in place since March 2020 were associated with a sharp decline in the incidence of infection, and the very high performance of the German healthcare system compared with other countries was maintained. Against this background, the restrictions have been successively released in all areas of the economic, cultural, social and educational systems since May 2020.

Even though a slight increase in new infections has been registered in recent weeks, the epidemiological burden in Germany with 500-1,500 new infections reported daily (corresponding to approx. 1 infection per 100,000 inhabitants) can be considered low to moderate. For example, no new infections at all have been reported in the last 7 days for more than 100 countries/urban districts (Robert Koch-Institut 2020). Relevant outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 infections have occurred only sporadically in Germany since May 2020.

With regard to the possible risks of SARS-CoV-2 infection, scientific studies indicate that the risk of infection through contact with contaminated surfaces (so-called smear infection) can be classified as lower than originally assumed. The greater danger apparently emanates from droplets and aerosols that are emitted when speaking, singing, coughing and sneezing. The risk of infection is particularly high in closed rooms with little air circulation, where possible infectious aerosols remain in the air for a long time and can transmit viruses from infected to non-infected persons (Morawska und Cao 2020; van Doremalen et al. 2020).

Depending on the federal state, concert and opera events have been permitted to be performed in front of an audience again since June 2020, subject to strict precautions. These relaxations also apply to cinemas and theaters. Corresponding recommendations for public access have therefore already been developed for some sectors (HDF Kino e.V. et al. 2020; Land Rheinland-Pfalz 2020).

However, these initial regulations have not led to any significant normalization of events in the concert and opera sector, because the strict rules on spacing lead to a

reduction in revenues, which makes operations uneconomical for most institutions. A specific concept should therefore be developed for the audience of concert and opera events, which takes into account the special features of classical music events.

The audience of classical music events is characterized by an informed understanding of health issues, disciplined behavior and careful compliance with guidelines. Even independently of the rules of conduct during the COVID 19 pandemic, it is common practice to maintain a socially appropriate distance. There are no conversations during the events, streams of movement and crowds are usually well controlled.

### **Recommendations**

Concert and opera events can audience operation under the following conditions.

- 1.) Distance rules must be observed in the areas jointly used by the visitors, including foyers, cash desk area, checkroom area and sanitary facilities. These areas should be provided with appropriate distance markings. The observance of the distance regulations in areas with increased public traffic must be ensured by appropriate routing with barrier tapes or tensors and by specifying the direction of movement.
- 2.) At the entrances, the public should be reminded of the coughing and sneezing etiquette and of the symptoms of a possible infection with the request to refrain from visiting the event in this case.
- 3.) Protective screens should be erected in front of the ticket offices, if not already in place.
- 4.) Contact person tracking must be made possible either by selling tickets only online with electronic filing of contact details, or, in the case of on-site ticket sales, by entering the contact details on a form.
- 5.) Admission and ticket controls should be contactless, by scanning or simple sighting, the invalidation of tickets by tearing them should be avoided.
- 6.) The adherence to hand hygiene should be made possible by providing sufficient soap, paper towels and disinfectant in the sanitary areas and additionally providing disinfectant at stands in the foyers.

- 7.) Contact surfaces whose contact cannot be avoided (door handles, armrests, counter surfaces, stair railings, the entire sanitary area) should be cleaned after each event.
- 8.) All employees from the service area who have contact with the audience must wear a simple medical mouth and nose protection correctly during service hours. It is not necessary to wear gloves if contact is avoided as far as possible.
- 9.) The visitors must correctly wear basic medical mouth and nose protection during entry and exit of the building and during their stay in the common areas.
- 10.) In the concert or opera hall it is also compulsory to wear a simple medical mouth and nose protector correctly. Subject to this requirement, the seats can be fully occupied. (Without a mouth and nose protector, a distance of 1m must be maintained).
- 11.) Sufficient ventilation of the rooms with fresh air must be ensured to avoid that aerosols remain in the air for a longer period of time. If the air circulation is closed (e.g. to save energy) a HEPA filter (High Efficiency Particulate Air Filter) must be used.
- 12.) Drinks should not be served and food should not be handed out, as it seems hardly avoidable that crowds and uncontrolled contacts occur on the catering areas and in the counter area without mouth and nose protection.
- 13.) The audience should be informed that the owner of the house may make use of his house right for persons who do not comply with the given rules.

## References:

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