ATHE COVID-19 RECOMMENDATION TASK FORCE
POSITION STATEMENT

1. It is the recommendation of this committee that it is not possible to safely resume in-person instruction in theatre performance studio classes at this time

The Association for Theatre Higher Education (ATHE) convened the ATHE COVID-19 Recommendation Task Force in July 2020 for the purpose of determining guidelines for safe teaching and learning practices in studio classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. We acknowledge that this pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, and are aware that these groups continue to be harmed as we look for ways to teach and learn equitably in compromised environments. Although face-to-face instruction is important in theatre, there are alternative modes of instruction that can be deployed more safely now while the risk of infection and disease is elevated. **Our first priority, therefore, is to convey solidarity for faculty and staff choice during this pandemic without fear of reprisal or the threat of job loss.**

Upon examination of the available scientific data (which we acknowledge is still evolving), the Task Force has determined that it is largely not possible to safely resume indoor face-to-face instruction of in-studio theatre performance courses, until individuals who may have the disease can be quickly tested, identified and isolated, or a safe, effective, and deployable SARS-CoV-2 vaccine is available. We acknowledge that if faculty do not voluntarily choose to teach face-to-face, they are not necessarily relinquishing their rights to a safe work environment or absolving liability for workplace illness.

2. Our position is based on assessment of discipline-specific risk factors in relation to existing scientific research on the transmission of SARS-CoV-2

Teaching stage performance is unlike other forms of instruction and the pandemic presents unique challenges specific to the discipline. Rehearsal, practice and instruction is experiential in nature and focuses on the acquisition and development of vocal, physical and emotional tools that help students meet the demands of performance. Classroom spaces must meet physical and mental health and safety protocols. While teaching methodologies vary, risk factors are greater than one expects in a traditional classroom environment. These risks are not confined to the classroom, but extend to rehearsal studios and performance venues. Some of these risk factors include:

- vocal projection (referred to by the CDC as “loud talking”), singing and shouting\(^1\),
- physical contact and/or close physical proximity between students and/or instructors/students, staged theatrical intimacy,
- physical exertion (e.g. full-bodied movement, active physical warmups,

partnered and group movement exercises, staged combat, etc.),

- shared use of rehearsal props, theatrical masks, costume pieces, stage furniture, etc.,
- expulsion of body fluids due to physical exertion (sweating) and voice/diction/breath work (spitting, increased exhalation of aerosolized droplets)²

Given these considerations, we recommend moving to online modalities for teaching theater performance at this time. In local situations where transmission conditions may be more favorable and both instructors and students voluntarily choose to assume the current risks, face-to-face instruction may be feasible where robust capacity for identification, contact tracing and isolation of exposed individuals is practiced and ideally where resources are available to ensure that individuals are regularly tested and receive timely results. Institutions must also have clear and enforceable guidelines requiring practices including social distancing, mask use, and hand washing.

3. Our position concurs with current scientific data and the findings of sister organizations

This position aligns with sister organizations and industry leaders in the field. The Lancet Journal of Medicine reports that, “systematic review and meta-analysis support physical distancing of 1 meter or more and provide quantitative estimates for models and contact tracing to inform policy. Optimum use of face masks, respirators, and eye protection in public …should be informed by these findings and contextual factors.”³ Actor’s Equity Association states: “… theater performers cannot utilize the most effective forms of disease prevention – physical distancing and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) – to protect themselves from COVID-19.”⁴ The Broadway League has suspended all live performances through 2020 “in support of the health and well-being of… those who work in the theater industry.”⁵ Therefore we join with The Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA), in saying: “until such time as a vaccine or cure for COVID-19 is developed…” the safest modality for teaching theater performance classes is online.⁶ Further information supporting this conclusion may be found in the appendix.

The ATHE COVID-19 Recommendation Task Force acknowledges that the global understanding of Covid-19 continues to evolve, and we will continue to monitor scientific studies on best practices as they affect our industry and our classrooms. We are actively engaged in creating resources for our membership that will help with risk mitigation for in-studio instruction, and creating gateway criteria for resumption of in-studio practices.

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²https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02058-1
³Chu, Akl, et al "Physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection to prevent person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19: a systematic review and meta-analysis" June 01, 2020
⁵“The Broadway League Announces Fall Performance Cancellations While Working on Protocols For Curtains To Rise Again.” June 29, 2020
Appendix


https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/7072-school-reopening-packet/b70172f2cc13c9cf0e6a/optimized/full.pdf#page=1.

https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/covid-19/higher-education.

https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31142-9/fulltext

https://s3.amazonaws.com/ClubExpressClubFiles/516524/documents/VASTA_COVID-
19_Guidelines_Parts_1_2_and_3_July_12_2020_404115147.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIA6MYUE6DNNCCDT4J&Expires=1595380729&response-content-disposition=inlinedocument%3B%20filename%3DVASTA_COVID-
19_Guidelines_Parts_1_2_and_3_July_12_2020_404115147.pdf&Signature=F0hGdTjVXEk0ue%2B5v1YYyT3GqtU%3D.

https://actorsequity.org/resources/Producers/covid19-info/ensuring-the-safety-


