

Covid-19 Guidance for Staff and Students

Information and guidance at BOVTS surrounding COVID-19

AUTUMN TERM 2021



**Bristol Old Vic
Theatre School**

1) Welcome from the Principal

Hello to everyone at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School,

The start of the new academic year brings with it hope, expectation and a feeling that some normality is beginning to return across the three School sites. We are planning to be able to deliver training in person, with fewer of the visible reminders around School (less signage, one-way systems, closed rooms, etc.) and want this to be as safe as possible for everyone at the School.

The Delta variant is still a real and very evident threat throughout the country, and Bristol has good days and bad days in terms of the numbers of cases. We continue to work closely with Bristol Public Health and to listen to their advice in order to keep the whole School community as safe as possible – which is everyone’s collective responsibility. If, as a result of any increase in cases or greater threat to the health & wellbeing of everyone at the School, further (more restrictive) measures need to be brought in, we will communicate these with you as quickly as possible, and explain why the measures are needed.

Wearing masks when walking around the School sites and in communal areas will reduce transmission, continuing to take temperatures will remind us all of the very real presence of the pandemic, and thinking twice about your actions outside of School and the impact those actions could have – particularly on productions – will all help to make sure the School can continue to work, and students continue to train, in as safe a way as possible.

The Covid Committee is meeting regularly and our Covid Supervisor can be contacted with any queries or concerns: covidsafety@oldvic.ac.uk

I wish you all a happy, healthy and hard-working year.

With best wishes,

Fiona

Dr. Fiona Francombe

Principal & CEO

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School

Introduction

As of Monday 19th of July, the UK Government lifted all remaining social restrictions in England, but under new government guidance to try to control the virus the use of face coverings in crowded areas and on public transport will be “expected and recommended”.

There are no longer restrictions on the approach to teaching and learning in higher education (HE) providers as a result of COVID-19. However, it is advised that HE providers should continue to conduct risk assessments for their particular circumstances. They should implement sensible and proportionate control measures which follow the health and safety hierarchy of controls to reduce the risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level. Below are the guidelines we shall be working with at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, specific to the School’s needs and requirements, for the beginning of the Autumn 2021 term:

2) General Measures

Vaccinations

By being fully vaccinated, the Government's advice is, you will be reducing the risk of yourself and others around you from contracting the virus.

Due to the nature of your training, you will be working in close proximity with other students, members of staff and industry professionals. Whilst the School cannot insist that you receive two vaccinations, by doing so you will be reducing the risk of yourself and others around you contracting the virus. Please also bear in mind that a lot of training takes place in professional environments, who will have their own guidelines and access arrangements, which may change according to Government stipulations being altered at any time. BOVTS staff and students will have to adhere to these regulations when working in these spaces.

You do not need to have both doses of the vaccine administered at the same venue. You can [book your appointment online](#) or [visit a walk-in clinic](#). There are walk-in clinics across the UK, many opening early and closing late.

Fully vaccinated individuals and under 18s will no longer need to self-isolate if they are identified as a close contact of someone with Covid-19. That means that if you’re not fully vaccinated, you’ll be required by law to self-isolate if you’re identified as a close contact of somebody that tests positive for Covid. There is further guidance later on in this document for those who have been identified as close- contacts of a positive case whilst being at the School.

If you are an International Student and aren't able to be vaccinated where you're currently living, there will be opportunities for you to get vaccinated when you're here.

If you haven't had your vaccines before you start, you won't be excluded from any timetabled classes; however, Government guidelines may mean you're excluded from social activities such as nightclubs and large indoor events.

Testing

We expect all our staff and students to take part in twice weekly testing. The Government has now made it possible for everyone within England to have access to regular LFD tests, which are currently free of charge and available at many local pharmacies and Community Asymptomatic Testing Sites.

You can get regular rapid tests if you do **not** have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

About 1 in 3 people with coronavirus do not have symptoms but can still infect others. Getting tested regularly is the only way to know if you might have the virus. If people test positive and self-isolate, it helps stop the virus spreading.

Everyone is encouraged to have regular testing twice weekly. There are three main ways to get a test:

- You can go to a Community Asymptomatic Testing Site and have an LFD test there, you will need to book an appointment in order to have a test done. Please see [here](#) to search for local testing sites in your area.
- You can collect a testing kit from a local pharmacy; there are several on Whiteladies Road (a 5-minute walk from the school) that are currently offering this service. You can collect up to a pack of 7 tests from a local pharmacy or test site. Find a local pharmacy near you [here](#) and find a local testing site to collect tests from [here](#).
- You can also order a pack of 7 tests to be sent to your home, see [here](#).

Please see the end of this guidance for a list of locations within Bristol where you can collect home test kits.

Wearing Masks

Our mask policy has changed slightly. Although you must continue to wear a mask at all times when in any communal areas in a BOVTS building, (unless exempt for a medical reason) there are instances where it is possible for you to remove your mask. Below we have listed when it may be possible for students to take their masks off, but this is always at the Tutor's/Director's discretion and is relative to each individual class. We ask

that students respect each Tutor's decision and the School will support each individual tutor's position.

- Masks are to be worn when travelling around any BOVTS building, as well as communal areas such as kitchens, common room areas, toilets, changing rooms etc.
- Upon entering your classroom or rehearsal space, please maintain wearing your facemask, until invited to unmask if you wish to do so, by your tutor or director.
- For **classes**, tutors may establish that they are happy for you to take your mask off for an exercise. This is at the discretion of the tutor, and of course it is your right to keep wearing your mask if you feel safer doing so. Until a tutor establishes that they are happy for you to take your mask off, please maintain wearing them.
- For **final- year show rehearsals**, it is ultimately the Director's decision to establish how they want to establish mask- wearing in their rehearsals, this includes for read-throughs, sharing research and warm- ups. Again, if you wish to maintain wearing masks then this decision will be supported and respected. There is an expectation that masks will be worn as much as possible.
- **For stationary desk/ computer work or in shared office spaces**, masks do not need to be worn if room capacity is maintained, ventilation is good and you have established with those you are sharing the space with that they are happy for you to unmask. When you leave your desk please wear a mask until you have returned to your workstation.
- If a student or students are up in a space performing, being observed for educational purposes by their Tutor and other classmates they can take their mask off.
- If you are being filmed or working in front of the camera, you do not need to wear a mask.
- During rehearsals, where there is 'active work' i.e. blocking, running a scene, working 1-2-1 with a Director or Tutor, students can take their masks off. Masks can be taken off for those who are up working in the space.
- If students are working up in the space with someone from their household, they do not need to wear a mask.
- If you are working on your own in a room, you do not need to wear a mask. If a group is working without supervision, (for example in a breakout room, or after

school) and you are within the room capacity, please establish with your group how you would like to work.

- If you are exempt from wearing a mask for medical reasons, you will have made your course leader (if applicable) aware of this and alternative arrangements will have been made.
- Please refer to signage found around school to aid in this safe practice. Please refer to each room's door for this information.
- If you require a visor please ask reception for this. Please be reminded that a visor is not as protective as a mask, for yourself or others, and should be worn with caution.

You must provide your own mask to wear on any school site, make sure you have a spare to hand and follow this guidance on safe mask wearing.

Social Distancing

In line with the easing of restrictions, social distancing is no longer required but rather a personal choice. Some students and staff may wish to continue to socially distance and their wishes must be respected at all times.

Ventilation:

- Good ventilation can help reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus. For instance, by keeping doors and windows open (weather allowing).
- Please leave windows and doors open at the end of your session in your room / studio if safe to do so in order to air it before it is next used. For those using rooms at the end of the day, please make sure that all windows are locked and made safe before you leave.
- As temperatures drop during the Winter, in order to maintain a comfortable temperature, short, sharp burst of fresh air will be key. We advise 10 minutes within every hour.
- Please make use of fans within rooms.

Temperature Checks

- You will have your temperature taken each day when you arrive at the School. You will need to declare you are not experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 and that you haven't been asked to self-isolate by NHS Track and Trace. Temperatures will be taken by a member of staff.
- If you have a raised temperature (37.8C or greater), a persistent cough or other symptoms of COVID-19 you will be asked to self-isolate and take a PCR COVID-19 test to confirm your result.
- Students must leave enough time before they are required in class to allow for the signing in process.
- Once you have signed in please head straight to your classroom/office, do not hang around in the reception, corridors or kitchen areas.

Cleaning and Hygiene

- Please remember to wash or sanitize your hands regularly. There are extra sanitizing facilities being put in place around the buildings to help you to do this.
- There is an expectation that all staff and students will keep each room tidy, clean and organised. Each room will be supplied with surface cleaner, blue roll and wipes to wipe down chairs and any other high contact surfaces that have been touched, for example, tables, door handles and equipment, after each class. Please place all disposable items in the C-19 specific bin for safe disposal.
- There will be a heightened cleaning regime in place; please be patient if some areas are temporarily unavailable due to additional cleaning.
- Staff and students are asked that they take responsibility for cleaning surfaces, equipment, and high touch areas after use.

Areas include:

- Handles on doors, windows, rails, and taps
- Control panels for equipment, control pads and switches
- Computer keyboards, printers, touch screens, monitors, and phones
- Work surfaces in studios, along with tools and machinery
- Toilets - please follow guidance in the next section on toilets

The School premises will continue to be cleaned as usual, with C-19 preventative measures taken by the School's external cleaning contractors. Due to the higher volume

of users (academic & support staff and students) at Downside Road, an extra clean of toilets at Downside Road will take place over the lunch period by our external cleaning contractors.

Everyone is reminded that it is an expectation that our cleaning guidance is followed whenever accessing any building. This is not just to protect individuals but everyone else who uses the space. **Please be mindful of the effects of your actions on others.**

3) The practicalities of coming to BOVTS in the Autumn Term 2021

External entrances/exits

- There is no longer a one-way system to enter our buildings but we expect all staff and students to continue to enter and exit in a respectful and sensible way. Staff and Students no longer have separate entrances and can all use the main entrance.
- There are hand sanitiser stations at all entrances to all School buildings and additional spaces and venues. Please sanitise your hands before entering, and on exiting, all School buildings. Help us maintain a culture of regular hand-washing as this is proven to be the most effective way to control the spread of the C-19 virus.

Procedures to follow when entering School buildings:

- A BOVTS staff member, or assigned student, will carry out temperature checks on all students and visitors entering School buildings. Staff will take their own temperature and wipe down the thermometer after use with the wipes provided. Any persons showing an unusually high temperature may be asked whether they have any other C-19 symptoms and will be asked to return to their homes.

Foyer and reception area:

- Please avoid socialising or meeting anyone in any foyer or corridors in any buildings. This is unfair on staff and students who may wish to move through these areas to access their study/workspaces.
- Everyone must sanitise and/or wash their hands before entering work rooms and studios.

- Printers are available for use so long as you wash/sanitise your hands first and wipe down everything you touched upon finishing.

Room Capacities:

As social distancing is a personal choice, room capacities have been increased. In the interest of maintaining safe practice and the types of activities that take place, certain rooms may have a smaller capacity due to the size and ventilation. Please refer to the signage outside each classroom and space for further information.

Toilets

- Toilets will no longer be assigned to courses. The Staff/ Disabled Access only toilet shall remain in the foyer.
- Please take responsibility for making sure the facilities are always left clean, and follow the guidance displayed within – this includes using the sanitising spray provided after use.
- Please sanitise hands before entering and upon exiting toilets.

Classes Outside

During the Term, staff and students are encouraged to take as many classes and activities outside as possible and practical. The rate of transmission is reduced by being outside and staff and tutors are encouraged to plan lessons according to the guidance. **Please make sure you bring lots of warm clothing with you, especially as we head into the colder months.**

Voice and Singing Classes

Both voice and singing classes will be taking place in person. It will be at the tutor's discretion to decide when it is appropriate for masks to be taken off for educational purposes. Reasonable measures will be put in place in order to promote safer singing, for example taking place in well-ventilated spaces, singing back-to-back, wearing masks whilst singing or expelling long breaths and keeping a good distance between each person.

Feeling Unwell/ Cold and Flu Season

- If you feel unwell and begin to experience any of the following:
 - Fever
 - Cough
 - Loss of taste/ smell
 - Sore throat
 - Runny nose
 - Headache

Please inform your Course Leader/ Line Manager as these are known to be common symptoms of Coronavirus and they will advise you the best course of action. As we are moving into the cold and flu season, we are expecting other colds and illnesses to develop over the term. However, it is best to act cautiously and in order to prevent transmission of symptoms, the School may advise you to take a PCR test and stay at home until you are feeling better.

4) What are Lateral Flow Tests (LFD's) and how effective are they?

It is advised that students have one of these tests before they are due to start at the school, and then one 3-4 days later. It is then advised that students undertake these tests twice weekly throughout the term.

- Lateral Flow Tests also known as LFD's and will be referred as LFD's throughout this guidance, are designed to detect the virus in people who show no symptoms and are therefore asymptomatic. If you are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 you are NOT to attend an LFD Testing site, and instead should book online to visit an NHS Testing site and have a PCR test or order one to be delivered through the post.
- LFD tests are an effective tool in the fight against COVID as they can detect high levels of the virus in people who might not be displaying any symptoms, and so are carrying on with their lives unaware that they are spreading the virus to other people. They may not however pick up cases where you are in the early stages of COVID infection.
- The process is very simple, much like a PCR test used by the NHS, you will need to use the swab to take a sample from the back of your throat on your tonsils, and then use that same swab to take a sample from inside one nostril. You will then need to wait approx. 20-30 mins to receive your result.

If you receive a negative result

- A negative result means it's likely you are not infectious. But a negative test is not a guarantee you do not have COVID-19 and there's still a chance you may be infectious. You should follow advice on [how to avoid catching and spreading the virus](#).
- If you did a rapid lateral flow test at home, [report your rapid lateral flow test result on GOV.UK](#) as soon as possible.

If you receive a positive result

- Upon notification of a positive test result (LFD or PCR), students and staff are legally required to self-isolate for ten days. You need to book an NHS PCR test to confirm your result. You must self-isolate until you receive your result. Once you have received confirmation of a positive result, you must then continue to self-isolate for the next 10 days.
- Before students get tested, you should make sure you have arrangements in place to travel home safely in the event you test positive. You should walk, cycle or drive wherever possible.
- You should not use public transport or a taxi or private hire vehicle to return home.
- Due to the nature of the tests and their ability to detect high and therefore infectious levels of the virus within people, there is still the possibility that you will get a negative test while still having COVID albeit with lower levels of the virus, and so continued vigilance is key. Further guidance on LFD'S can be found [here](#).
- If a student has recently (within 90 days) tested positive for COVID-19, they are likely to have developed some immunity. If a student has had a positive coronavirus (COVID-19) test in the last 90 days through NHS Test and Trace and been recorded as a positive case on the national system, they do not need to be tested again within that time period if they are asymptomatic.

5) What will happen if there is a fourth, or a local, lockdown?

Should this be necessary, the COVID Committee will decide on a course of action of how the school proceeds. The 'Outbreak Management Plan' document is added at the end of this Guidance under Appendix 1.

6) Access to Support at the School

Staff have been working on strategies that are thoughtful and responsive during this unprecedented time. These include building information, communication and practices related to how we can support students and staff who maybe disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

We recognise that students and staff may not have access to the technology and equipment needed for successful online learning including: a laptop, access to high speed internet and private space within the home for learning. Speak with your course leader or line manager to see how the school can help you.

We understand that Covid-19 can create levels of increased anxiety for both staff and students.

Staff: please talk to your line manager and/or the Principal. **Students:** please talk to your Course Leader or the Student Support Manager

Please also see the following for advice on emotional wellbeing:

- [VitaMinds](#) - NHS psychological therapies (self-referral)
- [Every Mind Matters: 10 tips to help if you are worried about coronavirus](#)
- [GOV.UK: guidance on wellbeing and covid-19 s](#)
- [Bristol Mind - Bristol MindLine](#) is a confidential freephone helpline, call 0808 808 0330
- [The Samaritans](#) has a 24 hour telephone and email support, call 116 123
- [AWP \(Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust\)](#) has set up a 24/7 phone support line for service users requiring support or advice during this time, 0300 303 1320
- [Directories of Bristol services](#) - Independent Mental Health Network, CASS and Well Aware

7) Further Guidance and Resources

Below are various links to information which we advise all should read. The information is constantly being updated so we ask everyone to take responsibility for staying up to date.

Information regarding the COVID-19 Virus

[UK Government Guidance](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[NHS Test Information](#)

[Performing Arts Guidance](#)

[Bristol Outbreak Management Plan](#)

[Coronavirus Support App](#)

Appendix 1

BOVTS COVID-19 OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT PLAN

This document aims to provide the information and plans necessary to support the staff and students during the opening of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School during the COVID-19 pandemic. The information applies to people at all main sites and any external buildings in use.

The Theatre School has established a Covid-19 Committee. This Committee is led by the Principal, Fiona Francombe. Anyone is welcome to join the Committee at any stage: The Committee will be quickly convened in the case of any concern or if any positive cases should arise.

There will be a constant open dialogue with the whole School community to allow issues to be raised and changes to be made to ensure everyone is kept, and feels, safe and supported.

Prevention and COVID Secure Plans

- Currently, masks must be worn at all times in communal spaces, and in class unless told otherwise by your tutor or in the circumstances where it is possible for masks to be removed.
- Hand sanitiser stations have been installed throughout the building, and everyone is required to use it upon entering and exiting any room.
- A culture of regular lateral flow testing will be encouraged. Students will be encouraged to have two LFD tests until advised by Government that it is no longer required. Students choosing not to have LFD tests can as an alternative choose to self-isolate for 10 days before arriving onsite.
- Temperatures are to be checked on arrival.
- Anyone who is feeling unwell is asked to stay at home, and anyone experiencing symptoms are asked to get a test as soon as possible and isolate until they have their result. They must make their Course Leader or Line Manager aware of this.

- Extra cleaning is in place and performed by an external cleaning company, as well as having cleaning supplies in every workspace for the users to disinfect when leaving.

Identifying Positive Cases

- Should a member of the School (student or staff) present with symptoms of COVID -19 then they must immediately seek to be tested. They should also inform their course leader/line manager of the situation.
- Should the result come back positive they should isolate for 10 days, either from the point of when their symptoms started or if asymptomatic, from when they tested positive.
- NHS Track and Trace will get in contact with those who have tested positive and it will be their responsibility to share the details of those who they class as their close- contacts.
- NHS Track and Trace will then get in contact with those people who have been identified as close- contacts.

Households and Close- Contacts

From the 16th of August, self- isolation rules for close contacts changed. Government Guidance outlined that you may not be required to self-isolate if you are notified you have had close contact with someone with COVID-19 and any of the following apply:

- You are fully vaccinated
- You are below the age of 18 years 6 months
- You have taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
- You are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons

Fully vaccinated means that you have been vaccinated twice with an MHRA approved COVID-19 vaccine in the UK, and at least 14 days have passed since you received the recommended doses of that vaccine.

How the School will treat close contacts:

- The School will risk assess on a case by case basis and decide the best course of action to contain spread and protect staff and students. Anyone identified as a close contact of a positive case will need to undergo a PCR test and isolate away from the school until they have had their result. The school will give them further guidance in the event of a negative result.
- Anyone who lives in the same household as a positive case will need to undergo a PCR test and isolate away from the school until they have had their result. The school will give them further guidance in the event of a negative result.
- In the event of a few positive cases appearing in a group, the School may initiate a 'circuit breaker'. This will mean the whole group are asked to isolate away from the school for a set amount of time in order to contain potential further spread.

What is considered as close contact?

Examples of close contact include:

- close face to face contact (under 1 metre) for any length of time – including talking to them or coughing on them, with or without a mask.
- being within 1 to 2 metres of each other for more than 15 minutes, with or without a mask – including travelling in a small vehicle
- spending lots of time in your home, such as cleaning it, with or without a mask

If you have had close contact with someone who has tested positive, you must self-isolate if you are told to by the NHS Test and Trace service or the NHS App, you should take extra care to follow social distancing advice, including washing their hands often.

If you get any coronavirus symptoms, you must self-isolate and get a test as soon as possible.

It is a legal requirement to self-isolate for 10 days if you test positive for COVID-19 or if you are identified as a close- contact and are not exempt from isolating.

Further Government Guidance about close- contacts can be found [here](#)

Identifying Emerging Outbreaks

As higher education settings have a greater risk of outbreak due to the movement of young people from across the country, we will be extra vigilant in our enforcement of rules around the Theatre School buildings.

If there are 5 or more confirmed cases whether linked or not, then this will class as an outbreak. The School will immediately notify:

- South West Public Health England (PHE) Health Protection Team – 03003038162 or swhpt@phe.gov.uk
- Bristol Public Health England Duty Team – ph.healthprotection@bristol.gov.uk

In this event BOVTS will work with Public Health England to consider who the affected persons are and act accordingly, which may mean having to close the School in order to ensure the situation is managed and contained. Teaching will resume online for those who cannot attend.

- On the advice of Bristol Public Health, the School may need to reintroduce some measures in order to contain transmission as best as possible.

Managing an Outbreak

If the School has five or more confirmed cases within 10 days, or an overall rise in sickness absence where Covid-19 is suspected, then we may have an outbreak and we will continue to work with PHE. In some cases, PHE may recommend that a larger number of other students self-isolate at home as a precautionary measure—perhaps a whole student group or year group. If the School is implementing controls and reducing transmission risks, whole School closure based on cases within the School may not be necessary and will only be considered following advice from PHE.

It is understood that, working with Bristol's Director of Health, where an outbreak at the School is confirmed, a mobile testing unit may be dispatched to test others who may have been in contact with the person who has tested positive.

Testing will be undertaken according to Bristol's routine public health outbreak control practice. The whole School community will be regularly and clearly updated on the outbreak control and support and guidance for all staff and students will be available.

Information on further control measures that will enable the School to re-open will be sent to the whole School community and any concerns listened to and addressed.

Community Asymptomatic Testing Sites within Bristol that you can collect home testing kits from:

Information regarding Bristol's rapid testing facilities can be found [here](#)

You can also pick up test kits from the main reception at:

- Easton Leisure Centre, Thrissel Street, Easton BS5 0SW
- Henbury Leisure Centre, Avonmouth Way, Henbury, Bristol BS10 7NG
- Horfield Leisure Centre, Dorian Road, Horfield BS7 0XW
- Kingsdown Sports Centre, Portland Street, Bristol, BS2 8HL
- St Pauls Community Sports Academy, Newfoundland Rd, St Paul's, Bristol BS2 9NH
- Hengrove Leisure Centre, Hengrove Promenade, Hengrove BS14 0DE
- Jubilee Swimming Pool, Jubilee Road, Knowle BS4 2LP
- Portway Rugby Development Centre, Portway BS9 2EJ
- Bristol Brunel Academy Fitness Centre, Speedwell Road, Speedwell BS15 1NU
- City of Bristol Gymnastics Centre, Teyfant Road, Hartcliffe, BS13 0RF

You can collect up to 14 tests (2 packs of 7) at a time.

[Please see this link here to view the Bristol Gov website, where there is more information regarding COVID-19 within Bristol.](#)