



26<sup>th</sup> October 2020

The Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP  
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
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Dear Secretary of State,

We, the Joint Morris Organisations (JMO) seek clarification on how Morris Dancing, practice and events, can safely proceed as we continue to find ourselves in the midst of this Coronavirus pandemic. In accordance with the initial lockdown, all Morris activity ceased. As lockdown restrictions were gradually eased, we have seen many other team activities resume. Many of these activities have been specifically mentioned in guidance, however Morris dancing has not been mentioned. Much dedication and organisation are involved in keeping our national traditions thriving and we are eager to resume Morris practice, in accordance with COVID guidelines, as soon as is possible.

The majority of Morris and related teams are members of one of three Morris organisations (The Morris Federation, The Morris Ring and Open Morris) or EFDSS (English Folk Dance & Song Society). These organisations provide guidance and support to their member teams. Together, the three morris organisations form the Joint Morris Organisations (JMO) who provides Public Liability Insurance and organises other initiatives that support local economies and communities through organised 'Days of Dance'. The JMO has no mandate to govern as an independent National Governing Body for Morris Dancing.

We are seeking clarification under the "rule of 6" as to how Morris dancing is classified and affected by the rule. We understand from the government guidance that it is either a "performance art" or an "organised indoor sport or exercise class" and therefore included in the list of exceptions to the rule.

Morris activity is divided into 'performance' and 'practice'. As non-professionals, we understand that we need to comply with the performing arts guidance when performing in public. Due to the time of year, this is not currently our primary concern, as we mostly perform outdoors. We are currently focused on enabling our members to find safe ways of practising and rehearsing Morris and related activities. The activities within our membership include a wide range of dance forms. Practices typically take place in community venues, are commonly organised by elected officers and run by an elected instructor or teacher. In addition to the work our members do in keeping these dance traditions alive, Morris dance not only promotes exercise and fitness for participants but also provides recognised benefits to mental wellbeing associated with performing arts.

The guidance on the restrictions in areas where the local COVID alert level is Medium (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-level-medium>) say that: "**Organised indoor sport and indoor exercise classes are only permitted indoors if it is possible for people to avoid mixing in a group of more than 6**". We understand from this that Morris dancers can meet indoors to practise in more than one group of six, but that the groups of six must not "mix" during the practice.

Our interpretation is supported in the guidance for the performing arts (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>), which now says “for adults, organised exercise classes can still take place in groups larger than six. When participating in any activity like this, you should not mingle in groups of more than 6 before and after the activity.”

It also says that “In a COVID-19 Secure venue or public outdoor place, non-professional performing arts activity...groups can continue to rehearse or perform together where this is planned activity in line with the performing arts guidance and if they can do so in a way that ensures that there is no interaction between groups of more than 6 at any time.”

We are therefore advising our members that Morris teams in England in areas where the alert level is Medium can resume practices with more than 6 people provided they have assessed the risks, put all the necessary controls in place effectively and there is no interaction between groups of more than 6 people at any time. Any team that cannot comply with the guidance, including ensuring that there is no interaction between groups of 6, should not practise.

Some of our members have asked us what “mix”, “mingle” and “no interaction” mean for Morris teams. Although some of the guidance does say a little more about what cannot happen (e.g. the performing arts guidance says “Participants must be in separate and distinct groups of up to six people which do not mix with other groups”), we are finding it difficult to give more specific advice and would appreciate clarification of this matter.

One key issue is how far groups of six should stay apart. One possible approach in venues with sufficient space would be to have two groups of dancers with six people in each, with a third group of up to six made up of the instructor and the musicians. Each group would be separated from the others, but the instructor and the musicians would be able to teach and play for both groups of dancers. An alternative approach would be to emulate dance and exercise classes where everyone is at least two metres from each other at all times. In this situation, we presume that more than six people could be involved, providing they maintained social distancing.

We will assume that our interpretation of the guidance is correct, unless you say otherwise.

We can provide a link to our guidance, which we update whenever the relevant government guidance is updated.

We understand that any future ‘lockdown’ may once again prevent any sort of active participation and we will support our members to follow all government guidance and rules. We are, however, concerned about the future of Morris and the health and wellbeing of our members, and wish to have in place all available avenues for full future participation.

Yours sincerely,

## **SIGNATORIES**

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