

Manchester Arena Inquiry: Covid risk assessment 31 August 2021

This note sets out our Covid risk assessment for the period to end October 2021 and the measures we have put in place to keep people safe. Our overall approach has been approved by PHE and Manchester City Council. A more detailed risk assessment will be published alongside this.

England has moved to Step 4

Although most legal restrictions have been lifted at Step 4 and many people have been vaccinated, it is still possible to catch and spread COVID-19, even if you are fully vaccinated.

COVID-19 will be a feature of our lives for the foreseeable future, so we need to learn to live with it and manage the risk to ourselves and others.

As COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, it is important that we all use personal judgment to manage our own risk. All of us can play our part by exercising common sense and considering the risks. No situation is risk free, so we all need to understand the factors and settings that increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission and the actions that we can all take to reduce COVID-19 infection, both for ourselves and for others.

What has changed

Most legal restrictions to control COVID-19 have been lifted at Step 4. This means that:

- You do not need to stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with. There are also no limits on the number of people you can meet. However, you should limit the close contact you have with those you do not usually live with, and increase close contact

gradually. This includes minimising the number, proximity and duration of social contacts. You should meet outdoors where possible and let fresh air into homes or other enclosed spaces.

- The government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can. However, the government expects and recommends a gradual return over the summer.
- The requirement to wear face coverings in law has been lifted. However, the government expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded areas such as public transport.

What you should do

COVID-19 has not gone away, so it's important to remember the actions you can take to keep yourself and others safe. While cases are high, everybody needs to continue to act carefully and remain cautious.

This is why it's important to:

- get a test if you develop COVID-19 symptoms, even if your symptoms are mild
- isolate if you test positive for COVID-19 or when told to do so by NHS Test and Trace
- meet others outside or let fresh air in
- minimise the number, proximity and duration of social contacts
- quarantine when returning from red list countries and for those people not fully vaccinated arriving from amber list countries

In addition, the government expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded areas such as public transport.

Whilst the government is no longer instructing people to work from home if they can, the government would expect and recommend a gradual return over the summer.

The government is also maintaining key protections, including targeted asymptomatic testing in education, high risk workplaces and to help people manage their personal risk. The government is encouraging and supporting businesses and large events to use the

NHS COVID Pass in high risk settings. The government will work with organisations where people are likely to be in close proximity to others outside their household to encourage the use of this. If sufficient measures are not taken to limit infection, the government will consider mandating certification in certain venues at a later date.

Understanding the risks of COVID-19

The risk of catching or passing on COVID-19 can be higher in certain places and when doing certain activities. The main way of spreading COVID-19 is through close contact with an infected person. When someone with COVID-19 breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes, they release particles containing the virus that causes COVID-19. These particles can be breathed in by another person. The particles can also land on surfaces and be passed from person to person via touch. In general, the risk of catching or passing on COVID-19 is higher:

- in crowded spaces, where there are more people who might be infectious
- in enclosed indoor spaces where there is limited fresh air

Some activities can also increase the risk of catching or passing on COVID-19. This happens where people are doing activities which generate more particles as they breathe heavily, such as singing, dancing, exercising or raising their voices.

The risk is greatest where these factors overlap, for example in crowded indoor spaces where people are raising their voices.

In situations where there is a higher risk of catching or passing on COVID-19, you should be particularly careful to follow the guidance on keeping yourself and others safe as we return to normality. Every little action helps to keep us all safer.

If you live in an area receiving an enhanced response to COVID-19

The government is working with local authorities in areas which need an enhanced response to COVID-19 to avoid the NHS facing unsustainable pressure. Enhanced Response Areas will receive

additional support, such as surge testing and logistical resources to maximise vaccine uptake, for a 5 week period. If you live in one of the affected local authority areas, you should read the local COVID-19 information and advice for your area:

- [Cornwall Council](#)
- [Devon County Council](#)
- [Council of the Isles of Scilly](#)
- [Plymouth City Council](#)
- [Torbay Council](#)

It is particularly important for people living in these areas to follow the guidance on this page which will help to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to help protect yourself and others.

Impact on the inquiry Hearings

The next phase of public hearings in Manchester are expected to run from 6 September to the end of October (2021). Over that period we will hear some evidence that will be distressing for attendees, particularly during Chapter 12 (experience of the deceased). It is essential that families are able to attend this stage and have the support they need around them. This includes both professional support (eg counsellors) and the informal network of family and friends.

We have sought the views of CPs over their planned attendance over the next phase and there is no indication of any significant increase in demand. However, we are aware that some organisational CPs would like to return to the hearing room.

The measures we have put in place to date (alongside HMCTS) have been successful and meant that we have been able to make great progress with the hearings since September 2021 and the Magistrates' Court has remained opened.

The court service will continue with minimal social distancing in place:

- adequate supplies of consumables such as soap and hand sanitiser
- signage – including NHS Test and Trace QR posters
- one-way systems where necessary
- wearing of face coverings in all public areas
- frequent cleaning.

They will increase courtroom capacity where practicable and it does not cause congestion.

The risk of being infected by Covid has not gone away, and the inquiry hearings involve sitting in the same room for several hours each day up to 5 days per week. However, in line with the HMCTS approach, we propose some relatively small changes to our Covid measures. We can increase capacity from 30 to 40 in the main hearing room (which is still below half its full capacity) by reducing the distance between participants where plexiglass is in place. There will still be a gap of at least 1m in these areas and we will maintain a 2m gap elsewhere. We will keep this under review, but this should enable us to meet any increased demand and keep people a safe distance apart.

The other measures we are continuing with are set out in the published detailed risk assessment. In consultation with PHE and MCC we have agreed the following key measures:

- We will continue to encourage twice weekly lateral flow testing for all attendees;
- We will continue to record the details of all attendees for T&T purpose;
- We will encourage families (principally through the room set up) to keep some distance in Spinningfields but accept that it has now become a matter of personal responsibility.

