

20.11.02

9 Deputy D. Johnson of St. Mary of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the review of existing restrictions applicable to small gatherings of musicians and singers (OQ.306/2020)

Further to the response to Oral Question 244/2020, will the Minister provide an update on the review into the identification of potential ways of easing existing restrictions applicable to small gatherings of musicians and singers; and will he state what the current position is?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

At this time, the current guidelines only allow for singing and the playing of wind instruments for children and young people in full-time education. Singing and playing of wind instruments is allowed in small groups where it is a requirement of the school exam syllabus. Group lessons and practice that do not include singing or wind instruments are allowed for groups up to 40. The guidelines provide for mitigations to reduce risk, including requirements for physical distancing, ventilation, hygiene and care for instruments. In response to the Deputy's requests, officers updated S.T.A.C. (Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell) on possible measures to mitigate the risks associated with the various activities, including singing and playing a wind instrument which are currently restricted by guidance. Given the local context of the increasing number of positive cases, S.T.A.C. advised against any general relaxation of restrictions related to these activities at this time but they did encourage further work by officers to review mitigations and options for small outdoor gatherings of musicians and singers for further consideration by S.T.A.C.

4.9.1 The Deputy of St. Mary:

I thank the Minister for his reply. Would he please address 2 particular points arising from such reply? First, to consider allowing the number of performers to be a minimum of 4 in recognition of the fact that most music, both instrumental or vocal, will be written for 4 parts that cannot easily be adapted for a lesser number and, secondly, in respect of outdoor performances to which the Minister referred, to drop the requirement that members of a group be 2 metres distanced from each other, all facing the same way on the basis that, apart from the difficulty of finding a sufficiently large space to accommodate such a requirement, compliance with it raises the potential for singers to be as much as 30 to 40 feet away from each other and for an ensemble it militates against what they are seeking to achieve.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have made a note of that request and I will pass that through policy officers to the S.T.A.C. advisers.

4.9.2 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

Would the Minister confirm that what he is describing have only been guidelines and so there is nothing to actually stop musicians, indeed, woodwind players or singers, congregating together on private premises if they want to perform, in the same way that masks are not obligatory, they are only recommended?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is government guidance, yes, Deputy, and I would hope all Members of the Assembly would encourage compliance with government guidance, which is informed by the best evidence coming forward from our experts, medical and technical advisers.

4.9.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

There seems to be a particular concern raised on social media around busking which, the Minister will know, does not fall directly into my powers or the Minister's powers but into that of the Bailiff's Chambers. But does he agree that there should not be a blanket ban on busking, as has been put forward for some reason and which is not supported by myself, because it is not all types of busking and street performance that cause concern? Does the Minister for Health and Social Services think that message needs to be driven home to whoever is making these decisions?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

If I can refer to my initial answer in which I stated that further work is being done to review the options for small outdoor gatherings of musicians, which of course would include a single busker. So that will come for further consideration by S.T.A.C.

4.9.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can the Minister please clarify the position for singing in schools? Because the answer that he has given today is different to discussions which I have had with him and officers whereby he had committed to finding safe ways for children to sing within their class bubbles.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, the position in schools is that singing and playing of wind instruments is allowed in small groups where it is a requirement of the school exam syllabus and mitigations are put in place. We have had very helpful discussions with the Deputy and we did commit to go away and look at what could be done because I do recognise the therapeutic elements and social elements of singing and playing instruments. But when this matter did come before S.T.A.C. because of the local context of the increasing numbers of positive cases, it is clear that S.T.A.C. advised against any general relaxation of restrictions at this time, so guidance remains as it was before our discussions, Deputy.

4.9.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Can the Minister outline what specific medical scientific advice was given by S.T.A.C. which leads the Minister to advise against children who are already interacting with each other within a class bubble, which would prevent them from singing together in those bubbles?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The concern relates to the spread of droplets, which is often a greater spread because of the activity of singing, whereas perhaps in the summer when we might have felt a little more relaxed and there were fewer cases and less spread within the Island, we might have thought that would have been an acceptable thing to do with appropriate mitigation. The present scenario is that it is felt on the balance of risks that that is an inappropriate risk to take.

4.9.6 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Congregations across my Parish of churches and chapels, and I am sure across the whole Island, are desperately missing singing as part of their weekly worship. What are the Minister's views on singing while wearing a mask in church?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Likewise, congregations in St. Ouen are missing their singing. I have not sought any express advice on singing with a mask. I will go away and ask and I will inform the Deputy.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am grateful.

4.9.7 The Deputy of St. Mary:

The Minister will appreciate that the Christmas season is a particularly busy time for musical participation. To avoid the cartoon in today's *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* as to "Silent Night" becoming a reality, would he please arrange for his department to liaise with organisers of such events as soon as possible to hopefully agree on revised guidance?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, there is a team of officers working on arrangements for Christmas and we hope to announce that as soon as possible and we will happily engage with all organisers of Christmas events.