

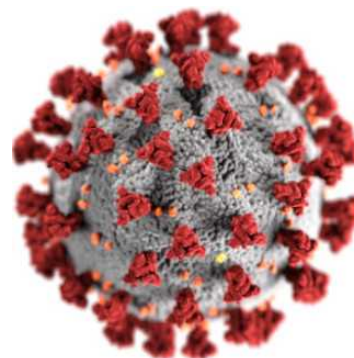
To Dance Or Not To Dance?

by Harold & Meredith Sears

Why aren't we dancing?

There are some round dance clubs that are meeting, many (maybe all) with at least some restrictions, such as limited attendance, restricted contact, distancing, and maybe masks, but many clubs have not resumed, and summer conventions are still being canceled.

The level of concern over covid varies among dancers (and everyone else) from one extreme to the other, but most have some fear. We fear the unknown and much is unknown about covid; it's new. The effect varies in different places and different people. Some show few symptoms and apparently recover easily; others say it feels like trying to breathe with an anvil on their chest or with a pool of sludge in their lungs, and they die after just a day or two. Even if you do recover, your lungs and other internal organs can be permanently damaged. Children used to seem little affected; now we hear about an unexpected "multi-system inflammatory syndrome" and it's early days yet. Other surprises are sure to come.



Of course, we're not just dealing with fear of the unknown. Covid is dangerous. It's more contagious and more lethal than flu or other prevalent threats that we're exposed to. Lately, it has been the leading cause of death in the U.S. (e.g., more than heart disease or cancer). The elderly are especially at risk. Most of us are not afraid of the flu. We don't want it. It can be miserable, but we "know" we'll recover. Most of us *really* don't want covid.

NY Times, 5/21/20 -- In late February and early March, some national and state leaders were still saying that covid posed no threat and were still urging people to congregate as usual. A recent analysis at Columbia University suggests that if the country had begun using social distancing measures just one week earlier than it did -- in early March rather than mid-March -- about 36,000 fewer Americans would have died. If the measures had been in place two weeks earlier, on March 1, the death toll would be 54,000 lower. That's over half of the total deaths to date. Some will argue that reports like this are exaggerated and politically motivated, but the NY Times is widely respected for its research and for basing its conclusions on studies, data, and multiple sources. Some will say that this is the past -- what's done is done -- but remember the adage, Those who ignore the past are condemned to repeat it.

How to get dancing again --

First, we should ask when should we resume dancing? Right now, many parts of the country are at Level 2: Safer at Home. We are no longer ordered to stay home, but are *strongly advised to stay at home*. Critical businesses are open and non-critical businesses are operating with restrictions. One reason non-critical businesses are opening is that we need the economic activity. People need to get back to work. Isolation and poverty are dangerous, too. Dancing is a

non-critical activity of little economic importance, but of psychological importance, so it should be allowed to operate with restrictions, although, again, we are "urged not to."

We need to regain confidence and feel safe. Part of this is simply living with the threat and seeing that we are not getting sick. We are all shopping, getting out and gardening, maybe walking around the neighborhood. We are all doing whatever we're doing, different things, and we're still healthy. Beyond our personal experience, things are opening up, and each example of this is an experiment in contagion. Restaurants are opening with outside seating. Maybe theaters will open with only every fourth seat and row to be used. Each venue is an experiment with human guinea pigs. We will hear if any of this leads to increased cases of covid and if not, we'll feel more confident about trying our own experiment (going to a dance). One problem we have is the lag time between exposure and development of the worst symptoms -- up to 3 weeks. So we can't note that business are open, there has been no spike in covid cases, therefore it's safe. The covid statistics we see now reflect the exposures that were happening a few weeks ago.

There is no way to be sure fellow dancers aren't infected and contagious. At one hospital, all women entering to give birth were tested for covid. Out of 210 who didn't show symptoms, 29 tested positive (NY Times). Even allowing for false positives, we see that we can't just say, "if you feel sick, just stay home." I can't know if you have the virus or even if I have it, but we can wear masks and keep distance. We can't be sure that other users of the hall didn't leave the virus behind, but we can disinfect surfaces. All this seems comparable to going shopping. Still, to look at both sides of each coin, risks are cumulative over time -- if you take several risks in a week, this adds to one larger risk.

Another feature of cumulative risk says that duration of exposure is comparable to intensity of exposure. You don't get the disease from one virus particle -- you have to get an "infectious dose" -- maybe 1000 virus particles. There is a threshold you have to exceed. [reference: <https://www.erinbromage.com/post/the-risks-know-them-avoid-them>] You can get a threshold dose from one full-in-the-face cough (3,000 droplets moving at 50 mph containing millions of particles). This is intensity of exposure. Or you can achieve threshold by breathing in 10 particles per breath over 100 breaths in an enclosed space where folks are just talking (200 particles released/min). This is duration of exposure.



When we do begin dancing, we can increase safety by establishing restrictions:

- Decide on a safe number of couples for the hall. Suppose the hall is 2,000 sq ft. Within that space, we have a circle about 120' circumference. Spacing couples at 10' to allow for accordion-like speeding up and slowing down, that's 12 couples, maybe 10 at first. If we don't plan for an inner circle, then there is extra leeway, room for faster dancers or for those who want more distance.
- Limit distance we draw from -- 10 mile radius? 25? -- so we don't import the virus from far and wide.

- Dancers must show no symptoms: fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, cough, stuffed nose, sneezing, shortness of breath, new loss of sense of taste or smell. We could take temperatures and/or blood oxygen levels at the door. Again, everyone who gets the virus is asymptomatic for a few days to a couple weeks, and some never develop symptoms but are contagious. Just because you feel fine doesn't mean you can't infect a friend (who then may not be fine).
- Wear masks, maybe gloves (no hand shaking or yellow rocks; wash often). Casual masks don't protect the wearer but are to protect others, so if everyone uses one, all are protected and we can still breathe. Have hand sanitizer available and use it. Use wipes on surfaces.
- Put up some of the chairs and move the rest 6' apart.
- Consider opening doors and even running fans to exchange air. Extended effect of exposure to small amounts of the virus is cumulative. Consider going outside for breaks. Restaurants are opening with *outdoor* seating. Our local library is opening for *outdoor* distribution of materials that have been on hold. Indoor congregation is more risky.
- Will dancers tolerate these invasions of privacy and limits to freedom? Some won't think they are necessary. At the other extreme, a concerned square dance caller recently said to another, you are one of the leaders who will determine who lives and dies. I hope we all can show respect for diverse points of view.
- In promotion/email, state rules and conditions. Require response/appointment. First come, first served -- the 11th couple must be turned away.
- Have sign-in sheet each evening. Put rules on top and agree that by signing you will abide by the rules. Include a disclaimer: Dancing, as all gatherings, involves risk of contagion and/or injury. Dancers agree to accept this risk. Or something simple like that. We must publicize the rules of the game well enough to avoid surprise and upset.

I know I haven't answered the question posed in my title. We each need somehow to decide when the benefits of dancing outweigh the risks.

An effort to collect ideas being discussed within the Colorado Round Dance Association, 5/23/20.

