

Statement on the current Covid situation

December 2021

Most of our member venues are under a huge amount of stress as they open their Festive Season shows. Normally this stress would be concern over technical/staging issues. At the moment the stress relates to the daily results of Covid tests! Should any cast or crew test positive then the show must close. In our small Off West End theatres this can be a disaster. We do not carry understudies/covers and the financial loss of shows being cancelled at short notice hurts far more in the independent theatre world than in the large venues, owned by the giants of the industry, that can absorb losses in the short term. Covid amongst the technical crew is even worse. There is such a general shortage of stage management/tech crew in the industry that finding replacements is virtually impossible. Our audiences are also disappearing at a rapid rate, cancellations are an everyday occurrence as people seem reluctant to want to sit in a theatrical space which is, in practical terms, very safe. The audience is fully masked, people sit with their backs to the rows in front and behind and face to face contact is minimal. There are (as far as we know) very few cases of the virus being passed on inside small theatrical venues. Contact is outside our buildings in unregulated situations and in places where mask-wearing is not compulsory. The future for many independent theatres looks bleak. Unless the Government brings back financial support similar to the 2020/2021 Cultural Recovery Fund many fringe/pub/off West-End venues will be lost forever.

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