



March 23, 2020

Statement re: Covid-19

The Skagit Valley Chorale is a volunteer, non-profit performing arts organization dedicated to bringing great choral music to our community. We held a regular weekly rehearsal on March 10, 2020 in Mount Vernon, WA. About 55 people (roughly one-half of the group) attended. On the day of the rehearsal, there were no cases of Covid-19 announced in Skagit Valley. There were no closures of schools, restaurants, churches, bowling alleys, banks, libraries, theaters, or any other businesses. The advice from the State of Washington was to limit gatherings to 250 people. There were no recommendations from Skagit County Health Department regarding meeting sizes, but they did state that people over 60 should avoid "large public gatherings." After much deliberation, the chorale's board of directors issued a statement to all members prior to both the rehearsal on March 3 and the one on March 10. It said that anyone showing any symptoms of illness, no matter the cause, should not attend rehearsals. Also, that anyone who felt their health or safety was in jeopardy should not attend rehearsals. Each member was left to determine for him/herself whether to attend. At no time was anyone pressured to attend if they were uncomfortable doing so, and while we normally record the attendance at rehearsals, it was not done at this time. At all times, the Chorale followed the guidance of local and state health authorities in decision-making processes.

Within days of the March 10 rehearsal, things changed dramatically. The first case in Skagit County was announced. Schools cancelled sports, arts, and other extra-curricular gatherings. Senior centers and senior housing facilities started limiting visitors. Activities and concerts, including our own concert scheduled for April, were cancelled. Libraries were closed. The federal government announced its 15-day "social distancing" policy in an order intended to curb the infection rate.

While all of this was going on, members of our group started to feel ill. By Saturday, March 14, there were six people who were feverish or otherwise not well. They were in communication with each other, and several of those people got tested. By Monday, the 16th, twenty people had symptoms and we had the first positive test result. By Monday evening, 24 were ill, some of whom attended the rehearsal on March 10, some who had only attended on March 3, and some of whom did not attend either rehearsal. By Tuesday evening March 17, we had 3 confirmed positive tests. One of our members, who is an MD, volunteered to interface with the County Health Department. The Health Department was provided with our member roster, and contacted every person in the group, regardless of whether they attended rehearsals on the 3rd and/or the 10th, and regardless of whether they were having symptoms. Each person was questioned in depth and received advice about what to do. By Friday, the 20th, we had 10 confirmed cases, and today, we know of at least 21 confirmed positives and 30 people (members and significant others) who are ill. This is a virulent and serious disease, whose symptoms and devastation are still unknown and impossible for us manage.

Sadly, one of our members died yesterday, and we have another who is hospitalized in serious condition. Out of respect to family members, we will not be providing names of those affected. The Health Department has that information, and we hope it can be used to advance the understanding and treatment of this serious illness. We urge everyone to practice social distancing, to isolate yourself for your own safety and that of others, and to stay in contact with your health care provider and/or the Health Department. This is a medical crisis that is all around us, and each person needs to do his or her part to help prevent further illness and deaths.