

Approaching Risk Assessment

Recording oral history interviews in person during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Purpose

This document raises questions and issues to consider when assessing whether to conduct oral history interviews in person during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not intended as a guidance document and neither the authors, the British Library or the Oral History Society can accept liability for any consequences which may result from the use of this information for any purpose. As this is a work-in-progress document which will be revised and updated the author welcomes comments and queries.

How to use this document

This document contains two sections: a list of general questions to think about before recording an interview in person, and a checklist designed to inform a risk assessment. The checklist has three sections: preparing for the interview, during the interview, and after the interview. Each section contains a list of possible precautions to consider for an in-person interview, with space for you to record the actions you will take to mitigate the risk of infection for interviewers and interviewees. The checklist is a sample form which should be tailored and adapted to suit individual projects.

Having considered the questions and checklist in this document you may decide to produce a detailed risk assessment and/or policy documenting the decisions made by your project with respect to recording in-person interviews.

Questions to consider before recording an interview in person

There have always been risks of interviewers and interviewees unwittingly passing on germs and infections during the interview encounter. Considering the highly infectious nature of COVID-19, particularly as those infected can be asymptomatic, more precautions may need to be considered before attempting a face-to-face interview.

Even if government guidelines are no longer mandatory, a project, interviewer and interviewee may still prefer to include some precautionary measures to minimise the risk of infection.

- Does the interview need to be recorded now? Can it be postponed?
- Will the project be jeopardised or run out of funding if the interview can't take place now?
- Can the interview be recorded remotely by phone or via the internet? Or could some interview sessions be conducted in person and the rest be recorded remotely? (See guidance on remote interviewing: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/covid-19/>)
- Is the interviewer happy to proceed and have they fully considered personal health, personal risk, caring duties, and mental wellbeing?
- Is the interviewee happy to be interviewed in their own home/garden? Are they aware of government guidelines and have they talked this through with their close family/friends?
- Are there any specific reports of high infection rates in the local areas of residence of either the interviewer or interviewee which might be a cause for concern?
- Is the interviewer able to safely travel to the interviewee's home? And if travelling by public transport have they considered what they need to do to minimise risk?
- Will any additional people be involved in the interview scenario, such as a second interviewee or camera operator?

Checklist – SAMPLE FORM	
For recording oral history interviews in person during the COVID-19 pandemic	
Project:	
Interviewer:	Interview reference:
Interviewee:	Date of assessment:

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW	Considered?	Actions taken to raise awareness and mitigate risk of infection
How can the project make the interviewee aware of the risks that come with in-person interviewing?		
Having pre-interview conversations on the phone to choose a suitable recording location and to discuss how the interviewer and interviewee will prepare for the recording; discussions might include optional measures such as ventilation of indoor areas, social distancing, pre-interview lateral flow testing, and vaccination		
Discussing what actions will be taken in the event of a positive COVID-19 test result for the interviewer, interviewee, or their close contacts, and establishing that personal data might need to be shared in the event of contact tracing		
Adding a section about the risks to the pre-interview Participation Agreement, to be signed by the interviewee, or sharing an information sheet detailing precautions taken by the project during the pandemic		
Interviewer may wish to disclose if they have had one or two COVID-19 vaccinations, and may wish to enquire if the interviewee has had one or two COVID-19 vaccinations		
Highlighting prevailing government advice about social distancing, COVID-19 symptoms and testing, and travel abroad		
What preparations can be made to minimise the risk of infection?		
Planning ahead when scheduling recording dates: if returning from travel abroad, interviewers and interviewees may need to self-isolate upon arrival back in the UK		

Preparing the recording location as agreed with the interviewee, e.g. ventilating the space if indoors, checking the weather forecast if outdoors, cleaning surfaces if this has been requested		
Interviewer/interviewee taking regular pre-interview lateral flow tests		
On the day of the interview, prior to travel, the interviewer contacts the interviewee and both parties confirm whether they have experienced coronavirus symptoms in the two-week period before the interview; if either party has experienced symptoms the recording session is postponed		
Interviewer checking their temperature before travelling to the interview		
Planning the interviewer's travel route in advance, choosing the safest option at the quietest times and via least-busy routes or travelling by car		
Is the recording equipment suitable for the interview location, whether indoors or outdoors?		
Discussing with the interviewee if the chosen location will be indoors/outdoors and windy/noisy, checking the weather forecast, and adapting recording equipment accordingly		
Choosing microphones that are suitable for the location, bearing in mind that using the built-in microphones on a recorder is incompatible with social distancing, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for indoors use clip-on lapel mics or stand mounted mics - for outdoors use wind shields on stand mounted mics 		
Using a portable power source such as a powerbank to avoid using the interviewee's mains power		
Ensuring recording equipment cables will be long enough, whichever microphone and power set up is chosen		
Planning ahead and doing tests to check the equipment meets all requirements		
In the event of the interviewee/interviewer contracting COVID-19, is the project (and the interviewer) covered by public liability and/or professional indemnity insurance?		
Checking insurance cover meets requirements in advance of undertaking any in-person interviews		

DURING THE INTERVIEW	Considered?	Actions taken to raise awareness and mitigate risk of infection
What measures can be taken to minimise risk of infection in the recording location?		
Personal hygiene e.g. washing hands regularly, coughing/sneezing into a tissue		
Option to wear face coverings before and after the interview, e.g. when setting up/packing away recording equipment; but removing face coverings before beginning the interview		
If using a clip-on lapel microphone asking the interviewee to attach it themselves rather than the interviewer approaching them		
Maintaining social distance between interviewer and interviewee		
Ventilating the room if indoors (before, during, and after the interview)		
Ensuring other people living in the house are not present or are in another room		
Checking that the interviewee has made arrangements for any caring responsibilities they have, if this is required		

AFTER THE INTERVIEW	Considered?	Actions taken to raise awareness and mitigate risk of infection
How can the interviewer and interviewee both safely sign the Interview Recording Agreement?		
Discussing this with the interviewee in advance and having a plan to sign the agreement either in person or via email/post after the interview		
What precautionary measures should be taken in case the interviewer, interviewee, or someone close to either party develops coronavirus symptoms at a later date?		
Staying in contact with the interviewee for at least 2 weeks after the interview to monitor their health		
Having a plan to update both parties in the event of a positive test for COVID-19		
Both parties having each other's contact details in case of future contact tracing		
How can the interviewer complete their visit safely and reset for the next interview session?		
Interviewer travelling home directly via their planned route		
Assessing whether any further precautions should be taken for the next in-person interview and updating project documentation accordingly		