



IDTA

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Dancing After Lockdown in New Zealand



Students from Michelle Robinson Dance Studio (Palmerston North) practising at home during lockdown

IDTA New Zealand Administrator Kelly Franklin-Browne reports.

Along with large parts of the world, New Zealand was suddenly forced into lockdown (or Alert Level 4, as we all referred to it as) by our Government to combat the COVID-19 virus. For us this occurred on 26 March – we were only given 48 hours' notice to get ourselves prepared. We had one of the strictest lockdowns in the world. The only services allowed to operate were Supermarkets, Dairies, Chemists, Petrol Stations and Medical Centres/Hospitals.



Students from Alison's Studio of Dance (New Plymouth) taking online classes during lockdown

This sudden change which forced all our dance teachers and students into their homes, meant our NZ IDTA members had to start getting creative. Teachers' upgraded their IT skills in a hurry and began teaching their students online, via Zoom, posted classwork to Facebook pages or YouTube, or made syllabus DVD's available to students to use from home. Many schools ran activities or challenges their students could complete at home, to keep up the contact between teacher and student.

We were extremely lucky here in New Zealand that due to several factors (going into lockdown early and quickly, great leadership from our Prime Minister, being an island nation and our small population largely doing as requested) our initial lockdown was eased after 5 weeks and on 28 April some services were able to reopen as the Government moved us into Level 3 of their Pandemic Control plan. We could go and get a McDonald's Hamburger or a takeaway coffee. Unfortunately dance schools were still closed.



Students from the The Rose Academy (Pahiatua & Palmerston North) dancing at home during lockdown

Again, things progressed well here in New Zealand with our Covid-19 case numbers steadily dropping and those being reported were all linked to a known source.

Therefore, from 14 May, the Government moved the country into Level 2 and largely everything reopened – with social distancing our new normal. At this stage dance schools could also reopen again as long as they adhered to social distancing guidelines and followed all advice from the Government. Our dance teachers and students were extremely happy and excited to get back into the studio and see everyone face to face again!

On Monday 8 June, New Zealand celebrated that there were no active cases of Covid-19 in the country and the Government moved us into Alert Level 1 – which means that we can go about our lives as normal, there are no restrictions on gatherings, no enforced social distancing and businesses could go back to running as per usual. The one regulation the Government kept in place to keep our population safe, was keeping our country's borders closed. Cases of the virus are being picked up at the border from New Zealanders returning home, but these are being strictly managed, and New Zealand continues to live at Alert Level 1. Now exams, dance competitions, shows and the like are beginning to get back up and running – our dance community is pretty much back to normal.

What follows are some explanations and photos from some of our New Zealand dance schools that are part of the IDTA community, detailing how getting back into dance has worked for their schools and students:

Jenna McKenzie School of Dance, Christchurch Returning to studio:

At first there was a lot of confusion around when we were actually allowed/was it safe to reopen and how many students we were allowed. It took around a week to hear some clarification, a news report/government announcement purely about dance studios being allowed to open came out.

We waited 1 extra week before opening, to be safe, give us time to re-enrol students and create a new timetable allowing 20 minutes between each lesson to allow for cleaning, assisting hand washing and taking children outside to find parents/ greeting the next class.



Students at Jenna McKenzie School of Dance practising Social Distancing in the dance squares.



The taped squares on the floor at Jenna McKenzie School of Dance

Distancing students

I taped a grid on the floor with insulation tape - roughly 2m x 2m. Our second smaller studio is 1.8 x 1.6m and it still works well for all ages. The tape removed easily and stayed on for daily floor washing. I originally had a "no go" gap between each square but found it was not necessary. We love the grid so much I'm considering keeping it longer, even the preschool classes stayed in the square like it was a cage (that sounds awful but it was so easy teaching!) Each dance square on the grid has a decal picture in the centre (in place of the blue X you will see in the picture) and it's honestly the best purchase ever! They don't peel off when washed and made the nervous kids literally run to choose which dance square they wanted.

Some further measures we took were closing the waiting room to parents unless totally necessary (preschool was one exception with 1 person only per student allowed). Five weeks later our parents are now allowed back in, but a lot are loving that their child is now more independent and staying away anyhow - so that worked out well.

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We have zoom set up in the corner of each studio to cater for the families not wanting or unable to return to the studio just yet. I have found zoom during lockdown has definitely helped the students attending, they are much more confident with remembering work and putting themselves in the front row when they would not usually, they seem much more attentive than usual too.

We have an exam session in 4 weeks, all my fingers are crossed for this one!

Best of luck to you all reopening xx

Jenna McKenzie

Carolyn McKeefry Dance Academy, Wellington
First Post Covid-19 IDTA Exams in New Zealand.

Students from Carolyn McKeefry Dance Academy in Wellington, New Zealand (some of whom are pictured with examiner Peta Spooner) sat their exams on 28th June. They ranged from Prep-Grades to Advanced II.

New Zealand went into Level 2 on 14th May and this enabled classes to recommence albeit with added health and safety protocols which included the disinfecting of bars at the beginning of each class, sanitising of hands when entering and leaving the studio, splitting class sizes and restricting access to the studio to students only.

With a 6-7 week lead up to the exams the decision was made to go ahead and every student had a complimentary class in addition to their normal timetable during this time. They all responded positively, worked very hard and rose to the occasion successfully - this being reflected in their excellent exam results.

Parents were fully supportive and many commented that it was great for the students to have had something positive and 'normal' to channel their energies into after the 7 weeks of various levels of lock down.

Carolyn McKeefry



Top: Students from Carolyn McKeefry Dance Academy ready for their exams with Examiner Peta Spooner

Middle right: Students from Carolyn McKeefry Dance Academy ready for their exams with Examiner Peta Spooner

Right: Senior Students from Carolyn McKeefry Dance Academy ready for their exams with Examiner Peta Spooner

Above: Senior Students and their Teacher Carolyn McKeefry with Examiner Peta Spooner