Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

WEAR A MASK. PROTECT OTHERS.

Polling Locations and Voters

Interim guidance to prevent spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Updated Oct. 29, 2020   Print

Summary of changes:

- Expanded guidance on changes to operations, procedures, and facilities for polling locations
- Added reminders to maintain accessibility
- Added recommendations for voters

Elections Toolkit
Resources to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmissions at polling locations.

Guiding Principles to Keep in Mind

The more an individual interacts with others, and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread. Elections with only in-person voting on a single day are higher risk for COVID-19 spread because there will be larger crowds and longer wait times. Lower risk election polling settings include those with:

- a wide variety of voting options
- longer voting periods (more days and/or more hours)
- any other feasible options for reducing the number of voters who congregate indoors in polling locations at the same time

The virus that causes COVID-19, is mostly spread by respiratory droplets released when people talk, cough, or sneeze. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. Personal prevention practices (such as handwashing, staying home when sick) and environmental cleaning and disinfection are important actions election officials, poll workers, and voters can take to help lower the risk of COVID-19 spread.

Recommendations for Election Officials and Poll

Workers

Promoting Behaviors that Reduce Spread

- **Stay home when sick or after recent close contact with a person with COVID-19**
  - Educate poll workers about when they should stay home and when they can return to work.
    - Poll workers who are sick, have tested positive for COVID-19, or have recently had a close contact with a person with COVID-19 should stay home. Ensure that poll locations are adequately staffed to cover any sick workers who need to stay home.
    - CDC's criteria can help inform when poll workers may return to work:
      - If they have been sick with COVID-19
      - If they have recently had a close contact with a person with COVID-19
      - If they have tested positive for COVID-19

- **Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette**
  - Provide an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for use at each step in the voting process where voters interact with poll workers, after using the voting machine, and as the final step in the voting process. Place alcohol-based hand sanitizer in visible, frequently used locations such as registration desks, where "I Voted" stickers are dispensed, and exits. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers may not be compatible with electronic voting equipment and may damage paper ballots. Poll workers and voters should ensure their hands are completely dry before handling these items.
  - Encourage poll workers to wash their hands frequently (e.g., before entering the polling location, before and after breaks or shifts, after touching or handling masks or PPE, after using the restroom, after touching shared surfaces or objects) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
  - Encourage workers and voters to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of their elbow. Used tissues should be thrown in the trash and hands washed immediately with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
    - If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

- **Masks**
  - Recommend and reinforce the use of masks among all workers. Masks are most essential in times when physical distancing is difficult. Information should be provided to workers on proper use, removal, and washing of masks.
  - Encourage voters to use masks while in the polling location. In jurisdictions where voters' masks may need to be removed to support identification procedures, alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol should be provided at the station so voters can sanitize their hands after removing their masks. A plastic barrier between the voter and the poll worker can provide additional protection. Post signs providing instruction on proper

removal and handling ⬇ [749 KB, 1 page] of masks.
- Note: masks should **not** be placed on:
  - Babies and children younger than 2 years old
  - Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious
  - Anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance

- Masks are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms. Masks are not meant to be a substitute for personal protective equipment such as surgical masks, respirators, or other medical personal protective equipment.

- Masks can make it more difficult for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing to lip-read, hear, or understand what people are saying. Communication can be supported with written communication, posting information/instructions, and decreasing background noise. Lip reading can be supported with clear masks, face shields, or plexiglass barriers. Consistent with applicable law, election officials should consider having supplies, such as clear face coverings available, to ensure that voting is accessible to people with disabilities.

- **Adequate Supplies**
  - Ensure you have accessible sinks and enough supplies for people to clean their hands and cover their coughs and sneezes. Supplies include soap, a way to dry hands (e.g., paper towels, hand dryer), tissues, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol (placed at every station, if supplies allow), disinfectant wipes, and no-touch/foot pedal trash cans (preferably covered).

- **Signs and Messages**
  - Post signs in highly visible locations (e.g., at entrances, in restrooms) that promote everyday protective measures ⬇ [268 KB, 2 pages] and describe how to stop the spread ⬇ [466 KB, 1 page] of germs such as by properly washing hands and properly wearing a mask 🖼 [JPG – 894 KB].
  - Include messages about behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19 when communicating with voters (such as on websites, in videos, in emails, and on social media accounts).
  - To the extent consistent with applicable law, ensure that any signage and messages are accessible to voters with disabilities, for example by providing large print or braille versions or having audible messages with the same information.
  - Find free CDC print and digital resources at the communications resources main page.

- **Social Distancing**
  - Remind voters upon arrival to leave space between themselves and others. Encourage voters to stay at least 6 feet apart. Polling places may provide signs, or other visual cues such as floor markings, decals, or chalk marks to help voters and workers remember this.
  - Have plans to manage lines to ensure social distancing can be maintained.
  - Clearly mark points of entry and exit to avoid bottlenecks.
  - Discourage voters and workers from greeting others with physical contact

(e.g., handshakes). Include this reminder on signs about social distancing.

Maintaining Healthy Environments

- **Disinfect surfaces**
  - Surfaces that are frequently touched by multiple people, for example door handles, registration tables, pens, and clipboards, should be disinfected frequently using products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims ⤢ .
  - Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, use of personal protective equipment, storage).
  - If the surface is dirty, it should be cleaned before disinfecting.
  - If public restrooms are available in the polling location, they should be cleaned and disinfected routinely.
  - After the polling location closes, clean and disinfect all facility areas and items, including all tables, chairs, door handles, and restrooms, used by poll workers or voters. The facility can be returned to normal use immediately with no additional precautions.

- **Clean and disinfect voting-associated equipment**
  - Voting machines, laptops, tablets, keyboards, ballot activation cards, and other reusable items should be disinfected routinely.
  - Follow the equipment manufacturer's instructions ⤢ for appropriate cleaning and disinfection procedures for voting machines and associated electronics.
    - To prevent damage to the equipment, post signs near voting equipment discouraging voters from disinfecting the equipment with their own wipes or touching the equipment with hands that are still wet with hand sanitizer.
  - Consider use of wipeable covers for electronics.
  - If no manufacturer guidance is available, consider the use of alcohol-based wipes or spray containing at least 70% alcohol to clean voting machine buttons and touch screens. Dry surfaces thoroughly to avoid pooling of liquids.
  - After the polling location closes, all equipment and transport cases should be cleaned and disinfected following the manufacturer's instructions prior to returning it to the election office.

- **Shared objects**
  - Where possible, replace shared objects, like pens or ballot activation cards, with single-use objects.
  - Shared objects, like pens or ballot activation cards, should be disinfected between users.
  - Headphones for voters with disabilities should be single-use or disinfected between users.
  - Minimize handling of shared objects. For example, reusable ballot activation

cards or ballot secrecy sleeves can be deposited into a container instead of handing them to a poll worker.

- **Ventilation**
  - Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk to poll workers, voters, or children accompanying voters (e.g., risk of falling or triggering asthma symptoms).

- **Crowd and line management**
  - Consider increasing the number of polling locations available for early voting and extending the hours of operation.
  - Maintain or increase the total number of polling places available to the public on Election Day to improve the ability to social distance.
  - Unless there is no other option, do not increase the number of potential registered voters assigned to each polling place.
  - Minimize lines as much as possible, especially tightly spaced queues in small indoor spaces. Use floor markings or decals and signs to remind voters to maintain social distancing while in line.
  - Limit the number of voters in the facility by moving lines outdoors if weather permits or using a ticket system for access to the facility.

- **Modified layouts and procedures**
  - Increase distance between voting booths to ensure that voters remain 6 feet apart.
  - To ensure sufficient space for social distancing and other measures, identify larger facilities for use as future polling places.
  - Modify the polling location layout to ensure voters move in one direction while in voting locations and to avoid bottlenecks, such as single doors for entry and exit.
  - Items to be reviewed, such as poll books or identification, should be placed on a table for examination to minimize handling.
  - Notify voters of changes to polling operations, including the availability of alternative voting options that minimize contact, as allowed in the local jurisdiction.
  - Ensure that any changes to operations do not limit accessibility to voters with disabilities.

- **Physical barriers and guides**
  - Physical barriers, such as plexiglass shields, can be used to protect workers and voters when physical distance cannot be maintained, for example at registration desks or between voting stations.
  - Consider placing markings or decal on the floor to remind voters to maintain at least 6 feet of space from other voters and workers.

Maintaining Healthy Operations

- **Where available in your jurisdiction, offer alternative voting methods that minimize direct contact and reduce crowd size at polling locations**
  - Consider offering alternatives to in-person voting if allowed in the jurisdiction.
  - Offer early voting or extended hours, where voter crowds may be smaller throughout the day.
  - Consider drive-up voting for eligible voters if allowed in the jurisdiction.
  - Encourage voters planning to vote in-person on election day to arrive at off-peak times. For example, if voter crowds are lighter mid-morning, advertise that in advance to the community.

- **Protect people at increased risk for severe illness**
  - Relocate polling locations from nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and senior living residences, to help protect older adults and those with underlying medical conditions from potential COVID-19 exposure.
  - Polling locations (e.g., libraries, schools) should ensure that voters can be separated from other facility users. For example, poll workers and voters can use designated entrances, exits, and restrooms that are separate from other facility users.
  - Limit nonessential visitors. Poll workers and voters should be discouraged from bringing accompanying persons (e.g., family members, friends) to the polling location.
  - Poll workers at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 should be assigned tasks that minimize direct contact with voters and other poll workers. These workers should be encouraged to practice preventive actions, such as social distancing and handwashing.

- **Consider alternative voting options for voters with symptoms**
  - Where possible in your jurisdiction, offer alternative voting options for voters with symptoms, those who are sick or known COVID-19 positive. Alternative voting options should minimize exposure between poll workers and voters, such as a designated polling site or curbside voting for sick voters. Poll workers assisting voters with symptoms should be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE), including respiratory protection, face shields, gowns, and gloves, and trained in the appropriate use of this equipment.
  - Post signs to discourage anyone with symptoms from entering the polling location buildings and provide voting options for those with symptoms. Ensure that any signage is accessible to voters with disabilities, for example by providing large print or braille versions or having audible messages with the same information.

- **Scheduled or staggered voting**
  - Consider offering scheduled voting or staggered entry to the polling location.

- **Mail-in ballots**
  - Workers handling mail-in ballots should practice hand hygiene frequently.
  - Mail-in ballots submitted directly to polling locations can be held for three hours prior to processing to further reduce risk.

- Machines used to process mail in ballots should be cleaned and disinfected routinely. Follow the equipment manufacturer's instructions ⧉ for appropriate cleaning and disinfection procedures for voting machines and associated electronics.

- Ballots can be stored as usual without additional precautions.

- Mail-in voting can make it more difficult for voters with disabilities to exercise their right to vote. Election officials should ensure that accessible voting options are available and that these options are consistent with the recommendations for slowing the spread of COVID-19.

Recommendations for Voters

More Info for Voting
In-Person Voters ⟩

- **Practice healthy behaviors to protect yourself and slow the spread of COVID-19**
  - Wash your hands before entering and after leaving the polling location.

  - While in the polling location, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol frequently, especially after touching surfaces frequently touched by multiple people, such as door handles or voting machines.

  - Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in lined trash cans. Wash your hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.

  - Wear a mask. Children under 2 and anyone who has trouble breathing, is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance should not wear a mask.

  - Maintain at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) of distance from others. It is important to continue social distancing even when you and others are wearing masks.

- **Consider voting alternatives available in your jurisdiction that minimize contact.** Voting alternatives that limit the number of people you come in contact with or the amount of time you are in contact with others can help reduce the spread of COVID-19. Check your local election office website ⧉ for more information on voting alternatives available in your jurisdiction.

- **Do not disinfect or wipe down the voting equipment yourself.** Electronic voting equipment can be damaged by cleaners and disinfectants. If you use hand sanitizer before touching the voting equipment, ensure your hands are completely dry to avoid damaging the equipment. Wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer **after** using the voting equipment.

- **Avoid crowds**
  - Use early voting, if available in your jurisdiction.

  - Vote at off-peak times, such as mid-morning.

  - If driving to the polls and your schedule allows, monitor the voter line from your car and join it when it's shorter.

- **Be prepared**
  - Check your voting location and requirements in advance because they may have changed due to COVID-19.

- Verify your voter registration information is correct in advance of reporting to the polling location.
- Contact your local or state election office ⬈ for additional information for voters with disabilities.
- Make sure you have all necessary documents to avoid delays at the polling location.
- If possible, complete any registration forms prior to arriving at the polling location.
- Where possible, review or complete a sample ballot at home to speed the process of casting your ballot at the polling location.
- Bring your own black ink pen.
- Bring a stylus or similar object for use with touchscreen voting machines. Check with poll workers before using.

Resources

Vendor and Manufacturer Guidance on Cleaning Voting Machines and Other Election Technology ⬈

Cybersecurity Infrastructure and Security Agency Election Security Resources ⬈

Finding Voting Locations and Poll Workers 🅿 [264 Kb, 7 pages] ⬈

Considerations for Modifying the Scale of In-Person Voting 🅿 [261 KB, 8 pages] ⬈

Health and Safety at the Polling Place 🅿 [300 KB, 12 pages] ⬈

Safeguarding Staff and Working Environment from COVID-19 🅿 [352 KB, 10 pages] ⬈