

Health Protocols for Elections

CHECKLIST FOR ELECTIONS

The following are the minimum recommended health protocols for all elections in Texas. County election officers may adopt additional protocols consistent with their specific needs and circumstances to help protect the health and safety of all voters, office personnel, polling place workers, and poll watchers. Any such protocols also must be consistent with ensuring and maintaining the integrity of the election process.

The virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to others by infected persons who have few or no symptoms. To mitigate this threat, everyone should rigorously follow the practices specified in these protocols, all of which facilitate a safe and measured reopening of Texas. The virus that causes COVID-19 is still circulating in our communities. We should continue to undertake practices that protect our communities.

Please note, public health guidance cannot anticipate every unique situation. As always, election officials should also be mindful of federal and state employment and disability laws, workplace safety standards, and accessibility standards to address the needs of election personnel, polling place workers, poll watchers, and voters.

- Consistent with the actions taken by many individuals across the state, consider wearing cloth face coverings (over the nose and mouth) when entering the polling place, or when within six feet of another person who is not a member of the individual's household. If available, individuals should consider wearing non-medical grade face masks.
- If the election judge is not able to determine the identity of a voter wearing a face covering, the voter should be prepared to lower or remove their face covering when checking-in at a polling place. After the voter's identity has been confirmed, the voter should wear their face covering through the rest of the voting process.
- If a voter contracts COVID-19 (or other sickness or physical condition that prevents the voter from appearing at the polling place on election day without a likelihood of needing personal assistance or of injuring the voter's health) after the deadline to submit an application for a ballot by mail, the voter should contact their county election officer for more details about submitting an Application for Emergency Early Voting Ballot Due to Sickness or Physical Disability.
- Individuals aged 65 or older are at a higher risk of COVID-19. To the extent possible, avoid contact within six feet with individuals aged 65 and older. Individuals aged 65 and older should stay at home as much as possible. Such individuals may consider submitting an Application for a Ballot by Mail to their county election officer so that they can receive a blank ballot and return their voted ballot by mail.

Health protocols for serving voters:

- Encourage voters, office personnel, polling place workers, and poll watchers to follow the Texas Department of State Health Services health protocols, including maintaining at least six feet separation from other individuals not within the same household. In addition to encouraging the practice of such distancing when feasible, other measures such as hand hygiene, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitation should be rigorously practiced.
- Encourage voters to wear cloth face coverings (over the nose and mouth) when entering the polling place, or when within six feet of another person who is not a member of the individual's household. If available, individuals should consider wearing non-medical grade face masks.
- Provide varied voting opportunities for voters by utilizing available early voting locations, extended voting hours, weekend hours, and well-advertised curbside voting.
- Provide updated information on the local election website regarding early voting schedules and voting procedures.
- Disinfect any items that come into contact with voters such as check-in tables, writing utensils, voting system equipment, ballot boxes, and doors leading into and out of the polling place.

Health protocols for your employees and polling place workers:

- Train all office personnel and polling place workers on appropriate cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.
- Screen employees and polling place workers before coming into a polling place:
 - Send home any employee or polling place worker who has any of the following new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19:
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Chills
 - Repeated shaking with chills
 - Muscle pain
 - Headache
 - Sore throat

- Loss of taste or smell
 - Diarrhea
 - Feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit
 - Known close contact with a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19
- Do not allow employees or polling place workers with new or worsening signs or symptoms listed above to return to a polling place or election office until:
- In the case of an employee or polling place worker who was diagnosed with COVID-19, the individual may return to work when all three of the following criteria are met: at least 3 days (72 hours) have passed *since recovery* (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications); and the individual has *improvement* in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and at least 10 days have passed *since symptoms first appeared*; or
 - In the case of an employee or polling place worker who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and does not get evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, the individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and the individual may not return to work until the individual has completed the same three-step criteria listed above; or
 - If an employee or polling place worker has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to work before completing the above self-isolation period, the individual must obtain a medical professional's note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis.
- Do not allow employees or polling place workers with known close contact to a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19 to return to work until the end of the 14-day self-quarantine period from the last date of exposure (with an exception granted for healthcare workers and critical infrastructure workers).
- Have employees and polling place workers wash or sanitize their hands upon entering the election office or polling place, and between interactions with voters or other personnel.
- Have employees and polling place workers maintain at least six feet separation from other individuals, when necessary. In addition to encouraging the practice of such distancing when feasible, other measures such as hand hygiene, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitation should be rigorously practiced.
- Consistent with the actions taken by many businesses across the state, consider having all employees and polling place workers wear cloth face coverings (over the nose and mouth)

at all times. If available, employees and polling place workers should consider wearing non-medical grade face masks.

- If a polling place worker is serving as an assistant to a voter, the polling place worker should wear a face covering while providing assistance. Polling place workers should also wash or sanitize their hands after completing the assistance.
- If a polling place worker is processing a curbside voter, the polling place worker should wear a face covering while interacting with the voter. Polling place workers should also wash or sanitize their hands after completing their curbside voting duties.

Health protocols for poll watchers:

- To the extent feasible, poll watchers should maintain at least six feet separation from other individuals not within the same household. In addition to practicing such distancing when feasible, other measures such as hand hygiene, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitation should be rigorously practiced.
- Consistent with the actions taken by many individuals across the state, poll watchers should consider wearing face coverings (over the nose and mouth) when entering the polling place, or when within six feet of another person who is not a member of the individual's household. If available, individuals should consider wearing non-medical grade face masks.

Health protocols for your polling places:

- Provide markings on the floor of the polling place that allow voters to maintain a six feet separation from other individuals not within the same household. In addition to encouraging the practice of such distancing when feasible, other measures such as hand hygiene, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitation should be rigorously practiced.
- Election workers are not required to ask a voter to remove their face covering upon check-in. However, if an election judge is not able to determine the voter's identity while wearing a face covering, the election judge has discretion to ask the voter to lower or remove their face covering. The voter should be permitted to wear their face covering through the rest of the voting process after their identity has been confirmed.
- Arrange voting stations to allow voters to maintain at least six feet separation from other voters.

- Block off frequently touched items of the facility that are not being utilized as part of the polling place to prevent the spreading of germs between parties.
- Regularly and frequently clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, tables, writing utensils, chairs, handrails, and restrooms.
- Disinfect any items that come into contact with voters after such contact.
- Make hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectant readily available to polling place workers and voters.
- Place readily visible signage at the polling place to remind everyone of best hygiene practices.
- For facilities that experience high voting traffic, consider having a polling place worker wholly or partially dedicated to ensuring the recommended health protocols are successfully implemented and followed.