



Introduction

This tip sheet is for employers, workers, and electors in polling places and elections offices, as an overview of potential hazards in the workplace due to COVID-19 and recommended control measures.

In all cases, guidance from regional/local Public Health Authorities (PHAs) and [jurisdictional Occupational Health and Safety \(OHS\) regulators](#) must be followed. Understand that COVID-19 transmission risk levels and recommendations may change or vary depending on local circumstances (e.g., local COVID-19 cases and variants, low vaccine coverage in the surrounding community, etc.)

Follow guidance provided by [Elections Canada](#) on how to run an accessible, safe, and secure election during the pandemic.

Employers have a general duty to protect the health and safety of their workers. For general COVID-19 guidance that applies to all sectors, refer to these resources:

[Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#):

- [Reducing COVID-19 risk in community settings: A tool for operators](#)
- [Adjusting public health measures in the context of COVID-19 vaccination](#)
- [COVID-19: Guidance on indoor ventilation during the pandemic](#)
- [Cleaning and disinfecting public spaces during COVID-19](#)

CCOHS [COVID-19 Resources](#):

- [Protect Yourself and Others from COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Health and Safety Planning for Employers](#)
- [COVID-19 Prevention for Workers](#)
- [COVID-19 FAQ](#)
- [Indoor Ventilation](#)
- [Cleaning and Disinfecting](#)

Consider the Risks

The risk of [COVID-19 transmission](#) is increased with:

- Close proximity (less than 2 metres) and interactions with people from outside of the immediate household, including close-range conversations.
- Direct contact (e.g., shaking hands, hugging, kissing).
- Longer and more frequent in-person interactions.
- Crowded places and large gatherings, both indoors and outdoors.
- Generation of respiratory droplets and aerosols (e.g., when speaking, coughing, sneezing, singing, shouting, and during strenuous activities such as exercise).
- Poor ventilation in closed spaces (e.g., accumulation of virus particles in the air).
- Inadequate personal hand hygiene practices or facilities.
- Contaminated high-touch surfaces and shared objects (fomites).
- Use of shared or public transportation (e.g., taxis, buses, rideshare, etc.)
- High levels of COVID-19 cases in the local community.
- Low levels of COVID-19 vaccination in the setting or local community.
- Inter-regional travel, including from areas with COVID-19 Variants of Concern (VOCs).

Risk of transmission increases more when several of these risk factors occur at the same time.

Consider all possible COVID-19 exposure scenarios in the electoral office or polling station setting, by performing a



COVID-19 [risk assessment](#). Develop or use an existing [risk assessment checklist](#) to document and evaluate all work areas, routine and non-routine activities, job roles, and local circumstances.

To provide the highest level of protection to workers and electors, use multiple individual and community-based [Public Health Measures \(PHMs\)](#) and [workplace controls](#) in a [layered approach](#). The sections below provide tips on how to apply COVID-19 control measures in electoral settings. Select the ones that are appropriate for your particular setting.

Protecting Workers

- Instruct workers to stay home if they are sick or may be sick. If they have symptoms, ask them to complete a [self-assessment tool](#) and follow the resulting advice.
 - If a worker is required to self-isolate or quarantine due to a possible exposure or confirmed COVID-19 test result, require them to stay home until they have been cleared to return by the regional/local PHA or a medical practitioner.
- Train all election workers on [personal preventative practices](#) including:
 - Keeping the greatest possible physical distance from people from other households.
 - Identifying [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
 - Properly wearing [masks](#) that are well constructed and well-fitting without gaps, where required.
 - Properly storing and disposing of masks. Instruct workers to replace masks if they become soiled, wet, or damaged.
 - Properly using personal protective equipment (PPE), as necessary.
 - Practicing good hand hygiene. Specifically:
 - at the start of shifts
 - before and after eating or drinking
 - after touching shared items or high touch surface
 - after using the washroom
 - after handling garbage
 - before leaving your workspace
 - Practicing good respiratory etiquette:
 - Coughing and sneezing into the elbow or tissue
 - Throw tissues into garbage immediately after use (use a lined bin if possible)
 - Wash their hands or use hand sanitizer after they sneeze, cough or blow their nose in a tissue
 - Avoid face and mask touching with unwashed hands.
- Provide training using virtual or electronic methods to minimize in-person interactions.
- Mask wearing:
 - Within electoral offices, workers are encouraged to wear a mask, and must follow the indoor mask wearing requirements of the regional/local PHA.
 - Within polling places, masks are mandatory for all workers including poll workers, candidates' representatives, security guards, auditors, and other observers.
 - Individuals may use their own masks (must be non-partisan and neutral colours).
 - Clear masks should be provided to workers, if needed for accessible communication with electors who are hard of hearing (lip-reading) or rely on facial expressions.
- Provide additional personal protective equipment (PPE) if required for the task (i.e., [face shields](#) if in close contact with others, gloves for protection from cleaning products or if providing first aid).
- Avoid sharing equipment such as pens, keyboards, computer touch screens, telephones, and headsets. If equipment must be shared, disinfect between users.
- Use safe ways to handle or to avoid directly handling elector photo identification (ID) and documents (i.e., trays, instruct electors to place ID on a raised tabletop platform, ask elector to hold the ID).
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces frequently. Use approved disinfectants and follow the manufacturer's safe use instructions or chemical safety data sheet (SDS).



- Vaccination:
 - Consider requiring all eligible electoral workers to be fully vaccinated. Note that mandatory vaccination may be required for [federally regulated](#) workers.
 - Assign fully vaccinated election workers when serving electors living in care facilities and other vulnerable communities, if required by the regional/local PHA.
 - Refer to the Government of Canada [Vaccines for COVID-19](#), [The facts about COVID-19 vaccines](#), [COVID-19 Prevention and Risks - Vaccination](#), and the CCOHS [COVID-19 Vaccines](#) for detailed information about vaccination.

Protecting Electors

- Electors must follow the mask wearing requirements of the regional/local public health authorities.
- Give masks to electors that come to an election facility without one, if required.
- Where masks are mandated, electors can be turned away if they are not wearing a mask and if they do not state to have a medical exemption.
- Emphasize on the voter information card that alternate voting methods are available (i.e., local election office, advanced polls, mail-in voting).
- Provide each elector with a single-use pencil or allow them to bring their own pencil to the polling place.

Polling Place Considerations

- When selecting venues, anticipate the expected number of electors. Consider increasing the number of polling places and extending voting hours, if needed to help manage crowds and keep physical distancing.
- Select large well-ventilated venues as polling spaces. Rooms with large volumes of air and high ceilings (i.e., school gyms, auditoriums, community centers, churches) are appropriate as they have the capacity to dilute contaminants in the air.
- Confirm with venue owners that mechanical ventilation systems have been properly maintained. Attempt to increase the ventilation of the space.
- While complying with local fire codes, have all doors propped open to increase ventilation and minimize the need for people to touch handles. Do not create any trip hazards. Have a worker responsible to close the door in case of fire.
- Post signs at the entrance of all indoor polling places to:
 - Communicate regional/local PHA requirements
 - Encourage mask wearing
 - Promote physical distancing and good hand hygiene
 - State the venue maximum occupancy
- Have hand sanitizer (with minimum 60% alcohol content) available at entrances, exits and at poll worker tables. Inspect and replenish them throughout the day. Make sure hands are dry before handling any materials and documents.
- Keep the greatest possible distance between people from different households (at least 2 metres, more if possible). Keep interactions such as conversations brief.
- Space tables and voting screens as far apart as practical. Consider having only one poll worker per table.
- Use floor markings, lane barriers, and directional signs to show people where to lineup, stand, and walk. Do not create tripping hazards.
- Consider assigning staff to control building occupancy limits and guide the orderly movement of electors through the ballot casting process.
- Have electors flow one-way through the election process, keeping cross traffic to a minimum.
- Consider configuring the polling place with a separate entrance and exit, on opposite sides of the room.

Elections Safety



- Consider installing see-through [barriers](#) (e.g., plexiglass) to separate election officials from others, when physical distancing is impractical or impossible or, in some jurisdictions, when a mask must be removed briefly for identity confirmation.
- Consider installing ballot box covers and privacy screens that can be sanitized between electors.

Election Office Considerations

- Choose an office with a large area to accommodate physical distancing of workers, electors, and visitors. Stage the office furniture and areas to keep the greatest possible physical distance between people.
- Make sure that mechanical ventilation systems are working and properly maintained. Ask the property owner to set the air exchange rate to the highest setting to help dilute contaminants in the air. A certified ventilation systems technician may need to be consulted before changing the settings.
- Post signs at office entrances with clear instructions that must be read and followed before entering:
 - Self-screening for symptoms of COVID-19
 - Mask wearing requirements
 - Vaccination status
 - Physical distancing and personal hand hygiene instructions
 - Maximum occupancy limits
- Consider using teleconferencing options instead of in-person meetings. If in-person meetings are needed, use rooms large enough to promote physical distancing. Keep the doors to meeting rooms and offices open to allow for air circulation and dilution.
- Implement a routine cleaning and disinfection schedule focused on shared workspaces and high touch areas and surfaces.
- Keep washrooms fully stocked with hygiene and cleaning supplies.
- Maintain physical distancing and good personal hygiene practices in shared areas, such as kitchenettes, break rooms, smoking areas, and washrooms.
- Discourage sharing of personal items, food, and beverages.

Administrative and Legislative Changes

- A contact tracing log is mandatory at polling places. Collect contact information, including names and phone numbers, from all electors and workers that visit local election offices and polling places. This information may be required by the regional/local PHA for contact tracing purposes if there is an outbreak. Make sure that [privacy](#) is protected, and that the information is stored and destroyed in a safe and secure manner, as required by privacy laws.
- Provide frequent communication and training to all electoral workers, especially if there are changes to electoral procedures or local COVID-19 risk levels. Include opportunities for workers to discuss any questions and concerns.
- Communicate enhanced COVID-19 protocols to the public using advertisements (i.e., tv, radio or print). Expand the capacity of mail-in voting and advertise its availability.
- Consider creating a procedure for the proper handling of shared paperwork (i.e., counting ballots, reviewing nomination papers). The procedure should:
 - List tasks that involve high touch surfaces or items.
 - Detail proper hand hygiene steps after touching those surfaces or items.
 - Describe the proper method of putting on and removing PPE, e.g., when a poll worker chooses to wear gloves while counting ballots.
- Try to reduce the number of workers in the local election offices and polling places.
- Stagger break times or shift times, where possible, to reduce the amount of time workers spend in close contact with individuals from other households.

Elections Safety



- Consider the visitor policy when selecting the polling place. For example, schools may have a no visitor policy in effect and may not be a suitable venue.
- Plan for an increase in foot traffic at advanced polling locations.
- Consider changing from a single polling day period to a multi-day polling period model. This change would spread out the peak times and facilitate physical distancing of electors. Weekend voting days could grant access to polling locations such as schools that would otherwise be unavailable.
- Provide returning officers with greater flexibility to safely serve electors in long-term care facilities, by increasing the number of voting days and working with each facility to tailor the approach to their situation.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact your local hospital, call 911 immediately, or contact a [Crisis Centre in your area](#).



It is important that mental health resources and support are provided to all workers, including access to an employee assistance program, if available.

For further information on COVID-19, refer to the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

Note that this guidance is just some of the adjustments organizations can make during a pandemic. Adapt this list by adding your own good practices and policies to meet your organization's specific needs.

Disclaimer: As public and occupational health and safety information is changing rapidly, local public health authorities should be consulted for specific, regional guidance. This information is not intended to replace medical advice or legislated health and safety obligations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.