THE ELECTIONS GROUP

Running a Safe Election in a Pandemic—Start to Finish

Issued by The Elections Group

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COVID-19 & Voting: An Overview

COVID-19 is disrupting long-established customs of election administration, driving voters to seek new ways to vote, and forcing administrators to meet health and safety challenges they did not previously face. There is a need for clear guidance on how to meet these challenges.

The health and safety guidelines presented here are based on information from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and practices adopted by other election offices across the country. They are current as of the publication of this document and are subject to change.

This guidance will help you prepare safe, clean environments for employees, poll workers and volunteers, as well as voters and election observers, allowing you to run elections without creating new health risks.

When establishing in-person voting and mail ballot processing procedures, and in all other election contexts, election officials should take the following actions:

1. Create site-specific protection plans for the office, voting and training sites.

2. Train workers on measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, including symptom screening, self-screening and staying home when necessary.

3. Implement face covering and disinfection protocols.

4. Establish and communicate physical distancing guidelines.

While this guidance provides some basic health and safety information, election officials should stay current on changes to public health guidance, and state and local orders to refine safety protocols since the COVID-19 situation is fluid. Links to updated resources on COVID-19 health and safety and election-specific guidelines are in Appendix B.

Election Site Action Plans

Election officials are encouraged to create a written COVID-19 prevention action plan for every worksite and voting location (referred to collectively as "worksites"). To prepare plans, perform comprehensive risk assessments of all worksites. Worksite specific plans should contain these elements:

- Name and contact information (or job title for voting locations) of individuals at each worksite designated to implement the plan.

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- Local health department contact information, for notification about COVID-19 cases among workers.

- Specific COVID-19 safety instructions and training including:

  o Cleaning and disinfection protocols;

  o Configuration for physical distancing, supplemented by traffic flow guidelines and physical barrier placement where distancing is not possible;

  o Behaviors required of workers; and,

  o Proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

To effectively implement safety plans, election officials should strive to:

- Train and communicate with workers on the plan.

- Regularly evaluate worksites for compliance. Document and immediately correct identified deficiencies.

- Investigate any potential COVID-19 illness to determine whether work-related factors contributed to risk of infection. Update worksite specific plans as needed.

- Adapt action plans to the level of local jurisdiction control over and duration of use. Specifically:

  o Central office facilities and long-term voting locations may require more detailed plans.

  o For Election Day and other short-term voting locations, ensure sufficient space for physical distancing, confirm cleaning and disinfection with facility management, and provide layout and traffic-flow guidance to poll workers.

    ▪ The University of Rhode Island has developed an online tool that can help you prepare voting site layouts (see Appendix A).

Personal Prevention Measures

People can best protect themselves and others when they understand basic facts about the transmission of COVID-19, and the importance of taking simple personal steps and community prevention measures.

Training Workers on COVID-19

Election officials are encouraged to offer training on COVID-19 safety to all levels of staffing. Training can be tailored to different cohorts of employees and poll workers (referred to collectively as "workers"). Training can include:

- Information on COVID-19, how to prevent it from spreading and which underlying health conditions may make individuals more susceptible.

- Procedures for self-screening at home, including checking for elevated temperature and/or the symptoms described below.

- The importance of not coming to work if:

    ○ A worker has symptoms of COVID-19 as described by the CDC, such as a fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea, OR

    ○ A worker was diagnosed with COVID-19 and has not yet been released from isolation, OR

    ○ Within the past 14 days a worker has had contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and was considered potentially infectious at the time.

- A worker with a COVID-19 diagnosis may not return to work unless 10 days have passed since their symptoms first appeared, their symptoms have improved, and the worker has had no fevers (without the use of fever reducing medications) for the last 24 hours.

- Anyone with severe symptoms including persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, or bluish lips or face should seek immediate medical attention.

- The importance of frequent hand-washing.

    ○ Scrubbing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

○ Using hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol where soap or running water are unavailable.

- The importance of physical distancing, both at work and away from work.

- Proper use of face coverings, and their benefits and limitations.

- Information on leave benefits an employee may be entitled to receive that would make it financially easier to stay at home (See Sick Leave in Appendix B).

Because understanding of COVID-19 is rapidly changing, this guidance may be updated. Election officials should also consult the latest CDC guidelines (see Appendix B for information resources).

Disease Control & Prevention Measures for Workers

Election officials are encouraged to create disease control and prevention measures for workers. Measures can include:

- Create a screening regimen adapted to different worker classifications.
  - ○ Employees at central or large facilities should be screened for temperature and symptoms at the beginning of each shift.
    - Take care that the screener avoids unnecessary exposure to those being screened by maintaining physical distance to the extent possible.
    - Even workers undergoing supervised screening should self-screen at home before work.
  - ○ Where supervised screening is not feasible, such as at voting sites, require self-screening at home.
    - Provide workers who must self-screen with updated CDC guidelines and COVID-19 symptom lists.
    - Confirm self-screening on worker sign-in forms.

- Instruct workers who are sick or exhibiting symptoms to stay home. "If you're unsure, call!"

- Encourage proper sneezing and coughing etiquette.

Stay home
if you are sick

Avoid close contact with people who are sick

- Encourage frequent hand-washing.

  - Soap and water, scrubbing for at least 20 seconds, is the best disinfectant.

  - Where soap or a water supply is unavailable, use hand-sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol.

- Provide workers with protective equipment, including face coverings and gloves.

  - Face coverings should be worn whenever a worker is near another person. (Note: election officials should stay current on changes to public health guidance and state and local orders regarding the use of face coverings.)

  - Consider face shields or other physical barriers, in addition to face coverings, for workers in positions where it may be difficult to maintain physical distancing.

  - Consider where providing disposable gloves may be useful.

- Workers should never greet co-workers and voters with physical contact, including handshakes. "Distancing starts at hello."

- Consider offering workers who request modified duties options that minimize their contact with voters and other workers, especially if they have risk factors.

- Post signage in strategic and highly visible locations to remind workers to use face coverings and maintain physical distance.

- Use email, texts, staff and poll worker newsletters and social media to reinforce your COVID-19 safety plan.
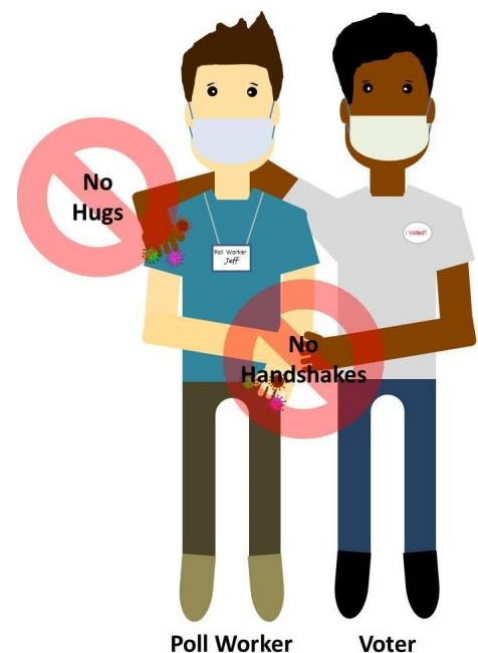
Protective Equipment

Face coverings, gloves and other protective gear can offer some protection. Election officials are encouraged to provide these items to elections employees and poll workers. Face covering should be provided to voters and observers if supplies allow.

Never share protective equipment. Prevent sharing by making adequate supplies available and disposing of disposable items promptly.

Masks/Face Coverings

The CDC stresses that face coverings slow the spread of the virus, in particular by preventing people who do not know they have the virus from transmitting it to others. The CDC cautions that not all face coverings are technically personal protective equipment (PPE), because they may not protect the wearer. Nevertheless, they do offer protection to others near the wearer. Face coverings do not replace the need for physical distancing and frequent hand-washing.

Counties are encouraged to provide face coverings to elections staff and poll workers for them to wear at the worksite. Consider a flexible program where workers with greater potential exposure receive face shields. Some assignments with greater exposure include symptom screening, customer service and any poll workers deployed in welcoming or informational roles at high traffic sites.

Counties are also encouraged to make disposable face coverings available to voters and observers who arrive without them.

To properly use face coverings:

- Cover both the mouth <u>and</u> nose.

- Wash hands before and after using or adjusting a mask.

- Wash or replace masks after each shift.

- Avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth.

- Avoid touching the front of the mask when putting it on, adjusting it, or removing it.

Wear a face mask

You could spread COVID-19 to others even if you don't feel sick

Poll workers must not turn a voter away for lack of face covering. The right to vote takes precedence. In such cases, poll workers should consider additional physical distancing. Avoid confrontations. Among other considerations, intense conversation and shouting increase the quantity of virus in exhalations and may increase risk.

Observers and other visitors are asked to use face coverings in many states. Election officials should consult their election attorney or follow state guidance.

Instead, poll workers should offer a disposable face covering (if available) to anyone who enters the voting location without one.

Some voters may enter the voting location wearing face coverings with logos or slogans that represent a candidate or ballot measure. This is deemed electioneering in some states. Where that is true, the poll worker may politely ask the voter to use a different face covering, or provide another face covering, if available.

The CDC has a web page dedicated to proper practices for wearing cloth face masks: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html.

Gloves

Counties are encouraged to provide workers with disposable gloves, especially in high traffic settings and areas where contact with frequently touched items is routine. These settings include symptom screening, ballot handling, customer service and voting locations, especially those with higher traffic.

Workers should be encouraged to wear gloves in these settings and wherever they have contact with items that others have touched.

Gloves alone do not guarantee protection. Wearers should not touch their mouth, nose, eyes or face covering with gloved hands. They should wash hands before putting gloves on and after removing them. The county should allow time for this as a work responsibility. Gloves should be replaced after washing hands, after using the restroom, eating or drinking, or any other activities that may contaminate the gloves, including touching unsanitized items.

The CDC has a web page dedicated to the proper wearing of gloves: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/gloves.html.

Organizing Worksites for COVID-19 Safety

In addition to measures taken by individual workers and voters to prevent COVID-19 transmission, election officials must organize all worksites around COVID-19 safety and health.

- Each worksite and voting location should be configured to ensure physical distancing.

- Cleaning, disinfection and ventilation procedures should be upgraded and tightened to eliminate or reduce any virus introduced into the workspace.

Physical Distancing Guidelines

Maintaining physical distancing of *at least* six feet between and among workers and voters whenever possible is a critical prevention measure. These guidelines apply to offices, voting locations and all other worksites.

Configuring Worksites for Physical Distancing

- Redesign worksites so all workstations, voting stations, check-in stations and other stopping points are separated by *at least* six (6) feet.

- Add partitions and visual cues (e.g., floor markings, colored tape, or signs) to remind workers and voters and to guide them to appropriate distancing.

- Where physical distance cannot be maintained, consider acrylic, plexiglass or other barriers to separate airspace. This strategy may improve voting station and check-in station capacity in voting locations with limited space.

  - Attempt to keep interactions and exposures brief.

  - Face coverings help to limit exposure.
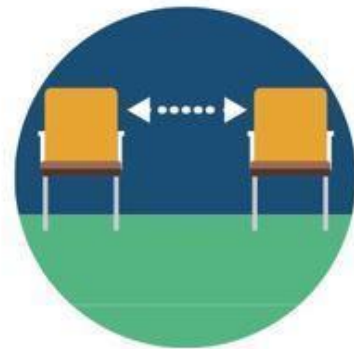
Work at least 6 feet apart
from other staff

Use partitions if 6 feet
separation is not possible

- Reduce break room capacity. Use barriers or increase distance between tables/chairs to separate workers.

  - Close break rooms if methods to ensure physical distancing are not feasible.

  - Where possible, create outdoor break areas with shade covers and seating to ensure physical distancing.

- Discourage workers, voters and observers from congregating in high traffic areas such as bathrooms, hallways, stairwells and during breaks.

Coordinating Entry, Exit and Queuing Strategies to Promote Distancing

- Consider dedicating workers to the point of entry. They can explain safety procedures and direct voters to check-in stations quickly, to ease entry bottlenecks.

- Implement foot traffic and crowd management strategies to ensure physical distancing between voters. This can include:

  - Separating the entrance and exit, if feasible and appropriate for the space.

  - Requiring foot traffic to be one-directional.

  - Guiding voters and observers with visual cues, barriers, props and signage.

- Where possible, leave doors open if they do not automatically open and close. Prop doors open during peak periods when voters are entering and exiting, in accordance with security and safety protocols—this helps keep people from touching door handles that may have contaminants and can help increase airflow in buildings and rooms.

- Create clearly-marked curbside or outside drive-through voting points that maintain physical distance with visual cues or other measures.

- Reconfigure seating and other public amenities to ensure physical distancing.

- If voting locations are located at non-governmental facilities, collaborate with building/facility operators to develop entry, exit and queuing plans that maintain physical distancing.

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Communication about Physical Distancing

- Display signage at entrances and other appropriate areas to continuously remind voters and observers of physical distancing and face covering requirements and updated foot traffic patterns.

- Encourage voters and observers to physically distance from those outside their household, to avoid touching surfaces and to leave if they feel unwell.

- Any children present in voting sites should remain beside their caregiver and should not interact with other people in the location.

Procedures that Enhance Physical Distancing

- Stagger worker breaks, in compliance with wage and hour regulations, to maintain physical distancing protocols.

- Establish directional halls and passageways for foot traffic to eliminate workers, voters and/or observers from closely passing each other.

- Designate separate routes for entering and exiting office spaces and/or voting locations to help maintain physical distancing and reduce instances of people closely passing each other.

- Limit the number of individuals riding in an elevator together and ensure the use of face coverings. Post signage to clarify these policies.

- Implement physical distancing requirements at loading bays and move to contactless signatures for deliveries.

- Require vendor representatives who enter election facilities to wear face coverings.

- Schedule workers as teams working separately from each other, if and where feasible, so that infection of one person will trigger quarantine of a smaller portion of the workforce.

Cleaning, Disinfecting and Ventilation Protocols

Election officials should take responsibility for upgrading and tightening procedures followed by cleaning and maintenance staff. Encourage all workers to incorporate simple cleaning techniques into their routines. And, because airborne transmission of COVID-19 is increasingly seen as a primary path of infection, officials should explore improving fresh air supply in all worksites.

Upgrading and Tightening Procedures for Cleaning Personnel

- Perform thorough cleaning in high traffic areas, which include:

    o Restrooms.

    o Employee break rooms.

    o Entrances and exits, including doors and door handles.

    o Stairway or escalator handrails.

    o Elevator controls.

- Frequently disinfect commonly used surfaces, including seating, counters, staff water fountains (spout, button/lever and nozzle), guardrails, displays, hand-held devices, shelving, tables, hand-washing and sanitation facilities, touchscreens, facility maps, vending machines, etc.

- Consider more frequent cleaning and disinfection of hand-washing facilities that are used more often.

    o Ensure such facilities stay operational and stocked at all times, and

    o Provide additional soap, paper towels and hand sanitizer when needed.

- Turn off public drinking fountains, cover with a bag or tape and post signs that they are inoperable.

- When choosing cleaning chemicals, election officials should use products approved for use against COVID-19 on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved list and follow product instructions. Use disinfectants labeled to be effective against emerging viral pathogens, diluted household bleach solutions (5 tablespoons per gallon of water), or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol that are appropriate for the surface.

- Train employees on manufacturers' directions and requirements for safe use. Workers who use cleaners or disinfectants should wear gloves and eye protection as required by the product instructions.

- Explore procurement options for third-party assistance to meet increased cleaning demands.

Simple, Routine Cleaning Techniques for All Workers

- Ensure that workers regularly clean and disinfect personal work areas.

  - Supply necessary cleaning and disinfection products.

  - Set aside time to clean and disinfect during work hours.

- Avoid sharing equipment and office supplies. This includes:

  - Pens, phones, desks and other work supplies.

  - Technology like touchscreens, tablets, laptops, keyboards, mice, stationary and mobile equipment controls and audio equipment.

  - If such items must be shared, workers should clean and disinfect them between each use.

  - Provide training and cleaning supplies appropriate to each item or surface.

    - For technology or specialty items, consult equipment manufacturers to determine appropriate disinfection steps (see Appendix A for information).

- Equip entrances and exits, promenades and other common-space areas with proper sanitation products, including hand sanitizer.

- Post signs indicating where the nearest hand sanitizer dispenser is located. Check hand sanitizer dispensers periodically and refill before they run out. Hand sanitizer dispensers should be touchless if possible.

- Post signs in restrooms with hand-washing instructions.

Regularly sanitize work items such as keyboards, pens, and any shared materials

Ventilating to Maximize Fresh Air Intake

- Maximize fresh outside air by:

  ○ Changing ventilation system settings to reduce recirculation and increase fresh air intake, if possible.

  ○ Opening doors/windows (weather permitting).

- Maximize air quality by:

  ○ Upgrading building air filters to the highest efficiency possible.

  ○ Installing portable high-efficiency air cleaners as needed.

Encouraging Voters and Observers to Practice COVID-19 Safety

COVID-19 safety and health plans will not be effective if voters and observers do not recognize their importance, do not understand expectations, or cannot find safe alternatives that work for them.

Election officials can develop a communications plan to let voters and observers know their role in keeping themselves and others safe. Plans should cover what to expect at voting locations, and, for voters, alternatives for returning ballots when postal return is not desired or possible. Communication products should include signage and simple messaging for poll workers to encourage voters and observers in voting locations to follow safety procedures.

The right to vote is of utmost importance. Even voters who neglect health and safety precautions must be allowed to vote if they enter a voting location.

Signage, Visual Cues and Messaging at Voting Sites

Election officials should use signage, visual cues and messaging from workers to orient voters around COVID-19 safety as they enter voting locations, coordinating with building management in shared sites.

One excellent way to ensure voters understand your COVID-19 safety procedures is to create a Sanitation Station near the entrance, and dedicate a staffer to welcome voters and explain procedures and ask them to have any needed documents or items ready.

Signage

Create entrance signage in all mandated languages with a simple message:

- Please wear a face covering over your nose and mouth.

- Maintain a physical distance of 6 feet from others.

- Use hand sanitizer at the check-in station.

- Place your own ballot into the tabulator or ballot box.

- Use hand sanitizer again after you vote.

Strong visuals can help instruct those whose language is not mandated.

Note that a large set of signs created by the CDC is available at a link in Appendix A.

Visual Cues

Consider signs or floor tape arrows to indicate preferred traffic flow. Replace tape daily at busy, long-term sites if needed. At high-traffic sites, consider a welcome staffer to explain procedures and to keep voters and observers from congregating.

In lines and possible points of congregation, use floor tape or decals to mark 6-foot intervals, allowing for the longest line that might be expected. The highest traffic sites may justify crowd control stanchions with belting.

Messaging

Poll workers are ultimately responsible for reminding and encouraging voters and observers to keep health and safety in mind. Suggest simple phrases to remind voters and observers of precautions:

- Thanks for wearing your mask.

- Remember to use the hand sanitizer.

- Thanks for keeping your distance.

And specific instructions:

- Ballots are fragile; make sure your hands are dry and your sanitizer has evaporated before touching your ballot.

- You can put your ballot directly in the tabulator (or ballot box). It's easy.

- Drop your activation card in the box so we can sanitize it for the next voter.

Voters without Face Coverings

Election officials should provide poll workers with specific instructions and messaging to use with voters who forget or who are reluctant to follow guidelines. Include methods to defuse potentially difficult situations with voters who refuse to comply with rules. Such voters must still be allowed to exercise their right to vote regardless of face covering or distancing compliance.

Simple messages like these can help your poll workers defuse situations:

- Following the guidelines (on face coverings or distancing) can protect you, your family and everyone else, so we do ask that you follow them.

- If you don't have a face covering, we'd be happy to provide one (if available).

- We regret that you're unwilling to follow the guidelines, but we do respect your right to vote. Please give us a bit of time to organize the area to provide additional physical distance between you, our fellow poll workers, observers and other voters.

Voters Who Refuse Face Coverings

People who refuse to use a face covering inside a polling place—including some who cannot for medical reasons—create health risks and challenging encounters for poll workers. Managing these encounters can impact the orderly, timely operations of the voting location. Concern over such situations may also impede recruiting and retaining poll workers.

Keep two important goals in mind as you develop plans for handling these voters. First, minimize risk. Second, assure your poll workers that risk can be minimized, that the situation can be handled without incident, and that they have procedures to minimize confrontation and risk. Also, assure poll workers that when de-escalation proves insufficient, added help is available. Write out procedures for seeking additional assistance.

Help workers understand that such voters must be allowed to vote, and that allowing them to vote—as safely as possible under the circumstances—will help prevent incidents like those seen in social media, most of which take place in settings where people are in fact barred from entry for not wearing face coverings.

An important underlying aspect of the plan is that face coverings and physical distancing are overlapping protective measures. Face coverings lower the risk of brief breaches of physical distancing. Accordingly, if a voter refuses to wear a mask, greater care must be given to maximizing physical distancing.

During the voting process, the primary areas of focus must be:

- Waiting to check in (i.e. waiting in line)

- Checking in (with election staff)

- Waiting for a voting booth

- Voting

- Casting the ballot

At each step, poll workers must be familiar with a plan that:

1. Attempts to keep everyone calm and limits potential escalation;

2. Doesn't unduly delay a voter without a face covering;

3. Communicates effectively with the voter;

4. Maintains physical distancing for workers and other voters; and

5. Provides a course of action if a situation escalates.

Observers who refuse face coverings

Election officials should refer to state or local health directives regarding face coverings in indoor public locations to address observers refusing to wear face coverings. State and local policies may differ. Where observers are excluded, communicate with the campaign or organization about finding an alternate observer.

Conflict, De-escalation and Seeking Back-up

Experience suggests that face coverings are a common, if unfortunate, point of conflict, but that few people object to distancing once they understand that they will be allowed to vote with or without a face covering. However, voters who arrive expecting conflict may have difficulty recognizing that their right to vote is being respected because of their stress level on arrival.

Poll workers will need to rise above the anger, using de-escalation measures to lower the stress level of the voter and reach the best possible outcome.

Since poll workers themselves will also find these encounters stressful, it will be helpful to practice de-escalation measures beforehand, as well as those measures required when de-escalation fails, using role-playing. Key elements:

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- Speak with a calm voice at a normal volume, and communicate by your posture and facial expression that you are confident the voter will understand that their right to vote will be respected.

- Resist the urge to engage on the underlying objection.

- Repeatedly use words like "You're going to get to vote. We will get you to the voting booth as quickly as possible."

- Remember that serving the voter quickly, with less conflict, will best ensure your safety and that of other workers and voters.

Seeking Back-up When De-Escalation Fails

Election officials should determine the appropriate response when de-escalation related to face covering fails—building security or law enforcement—and provide that information for each site. Consider requesting that a law enforcement staffer be temporarily assigned to your office.

- Poll workers should role-play a possible negative outcome to de-escalation.

- Consider how to recognize that de-escalation is failing:
  - Look for changes in posture or tone from the voter that suggest they are getting angrier despite de-escalation attempts.
    - Poll workers should be instructed to call the election office at a specific phone number if they feel threatened or intimidated, if voters feel threatened or intimidated, or if a disturbance of any kind occurs.
    - Poll workers should be instructed to call local law enforcement first if they believe the safety of any person in the polling place is in jeopardy.
  - Make sure that more than one poll worker is present in any conflict situation, with one worker engaging the voter, the other standing back to assess where the encounter is trending.
  - Consider whether time devoted to the upset voter is significantly delaying other voters in deciding when to seek outside help.

- Settle on a method for requesting back-up from security or law enforcement.

- Establish a safe, coded phrase that all poll workers at a site will recognize as a request for security or law enforcement help. (For example: "Is John here?" where no one named John is working)

- Have relevant phone numbers readily available—keyed into poll worker phones, for instance.

Waiting to Check In: The Primary Defense is Physical Distancing

If workers know of a voter waiting without a face covering, and confirm that the voter will not wear one, they should stand at a distance to speak with the voter.

- Reassure the voter that their right to vote expeditiously will be respected.

- Ask whether they are willing to maintain appropriate distance from voters in front of them and from workers at check-in and scanning stations.

- The primary defense in this instance is physical distancing.

  - Also, avoiding conflict will minimize the volume of air exchange. (Shouting and excitement can maximize air exchange and risk.)

- Inform the voter of any marginally different processing to expect at forthcoming stages of the voting process.

Where Distance is Insufficient

If a voter refuses to maintain social distance or your jurisdiction has a more stringent policy, consider moving that voter into a separate space while holding their spot in line. Note that this new process may be an administrative burden and/or may cause an escalation.

- Explain to the voter that they will be checked in without delay and their place in line will be held for them; that you recognize their right to vote (without reference to their decision on face covering), but that the situation will require modified procedures.

- Take the voter's information on a clipboard—name, address and other needed details. Have the voter verbally verify the accuracy of their information.

- Select a worker in charge of monitoring the line and summoning the voter at the appropriate moment. Introduce this worker to the voter.

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- Direct the voter to wait in an appropriate space you have selected—an outdoor space, in their vehicle, or a larger indoor space away from others. If such a space has sight lines to the check-in, that will reassure the voter.

- Summon the voter when their place in line is next.

- Find the voter in the pollbook while or before they approach to minimize the duration of physical proximity.

In jurisdictions anticipating separating voters from the line, election officials should consider providing an additional staffer and/or cell phones at busy sites to allow text coordination with a voter.

Check-In

At check-in, ensure physical distancing from poll workers and other voters.

- Explain to the voter where you would like them to stand, if at a greater distance from check-in.

- If possible, ensure that all check-in stations are appropriately distanced and protected with barriers.

  - If needed, create at least one check-in station that meets the requirements of a designated station for voters without face coverings.

  - If neither option is viable, it may be necessary to move surrounding check-in stations to appropriate distances or to pause check-in while such voters are handled.

- Use pauses to allow distancing between tasks, asking the voter to move forward to the table, then back to the standing point, the poll worker doing the same. These create a moving 6-foot zone.

Voting and Waiting for a Booth

Prepare a voting booth that is physically distanced from other booths and stations. It's possible that all booths will fit these criteria in your standard set-up.

Election officials should consider whether one or more booths could be equipped with plexiglass to allow further division of air space.

- Explain to the voter which booth they will need to use.

- Reiterate that they will vote as quickly as possible, stressing that you need to maintain physical distance between them and other voters and workers.

- If necessary, move surrounding voting booths.

- Judge how quickly such a booth can be available and inform the voter.

- If the wait time will be long because only a certain booth is appropriate, consider whether there is appropriate waiting space to allow physical distancing within the site, or follow the procedures described in the Waiting to Check In section.

- When an appropriate voting booth becomes available, direct the voter, using a route 6 feet from other voters and workers.

- Explain that you'd like the voter to let you know when they have completed marking their ballot, so you can create distance as they go to cast it.

- Disinfect the voting booth, following instructions appropriate for the equipment and booth, after the voter leaves.

Casting the Ballot

When the voter indicates they are ready to cast their ballot, direct them to the ballot scanner, using a route keeping them 6 feet from other voters and workers.

- If necessary, hold the voter back at a 6-foot distance while a previous voter completes the process; and delay any other voters while the scofflaw voter casts their ballot.

- Explain any distinct procedures to the voter.

- If poll worker intervention is necessary, follow the move-forward, step-back process described in the Check-In section.

- Direct the voter to the exit, using a route that maintains 6 feet from other voters and workers.

Media, Social Media & Direct Communication

Use communication and outreach channels to encourage safe voting. Tell voters:

- Voting by mail is a safe choice to avoid exposure to COVID-19.

- If you cannot vote or return your ballot by mail, you can obtain a ballot replacement or return a ballot without entering a voting site.

  - Messaging should include how to request a replacement or find a drop box, drive-through location and/or curbside voting (where allowed).

- If you must enter a voting location, please

  - Wear a face covering.

  - Maintain physical distance of at least six feet from people not from your household.

  - Use hand sanitizer before approaching the check-in station and after voting.

  - Follow any additional guidance provided at the voting location.

Outreach should include:

- Local news media.

- Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

- Direct communications with voters, in mandated languages and others as feasible.

- County and/or elections department websites. Consider creating a COVID-19 safety page on your website and including that link in all routine communication with voters.

Alternative Methods for Issuing and Collecting Ballots

The best way for voters to avoid exposure is by returning the ballot mailed to them without going to an in-person voting location. Circumstances could prevent some voters, including some voters with disabilities, from marking that ballot or from putting it in the mail for a timely return. Establishing and communicating alternatives can reduce your voters' need to go to voting locations.

Drive-Through Drop-Off

Voters distrustful of mail service or late in completing their mail ballot can still be nudged to avoid in-person voting locations if you provide a convenient, non-mail alternative for returning their ballot. A drive-through drop-off site allows a voter to place their ballot in a secure drop box without leaving their vehicle.

Drive-Through Voter Services

Counties should also consider a drive-up alternative for other services provided at voting locations such as check-in, receiving a voter registration form or receiving a replacement ballot.

A drive-through location can help certain voters with disabilities, and also provide a back-up for any voting location that might be forced to shut down. Prior to the November 3, 2020 General Election, counties should consider acquiring the equipment and materials needed to set-up a drive-through option.

Drive-Through Voting and COVID-19 Impacted Voters

A drive-through or curbside voting location offering a broad set of services (see above) may be especially useful for voters who believe they are or may be COVID-19 positive. However, providing such a service carries a higher risk of transmission to workers. Extra care is needed to protect workers in this environment including issuing appropriate protective equipment and adding safe operating protocols.

Replacement Ballots

Some voters will not receive their mail ballot, will receive a damaged ballot or will spoil their ballot in some way. Providing convenient methods to request a replacement can deter a visit to a voting site.

Keep in mind that such requests are likely to far outpace past elections, and assign staff accordingly.

Guidelines for Distinct Work Areas and Tasks

Voting Locations: Special Considerations for COVID-19 Prevention

Physical Distancing Considerations for the Voting Location

Counties should observe all guidelines in the Physical Distancing Guidelines section of this document, notably the standard of six feet of separation.

Special distancing considerations for voting locations include layout, signage and visual cues to help voters and observers understand where to stand and move.

Layout

Election officials should, if possible, provide custom layouts for voting locations, especially for high traffic sites (see the University of Rhode Island design tool in Appendix A). Where that is not possible, provide poll workers with a set of model layouts showing how different spaces can be organized.

A critical element of the voting site layout is the circuit - a standard flow of traffic in a generally circular or one-way direction, starting with check-in, then voting booths, then scanner, minimizing cross-traffic.

- Positioning check-in and scanner near entrance/exit allows traffic flow with few crossing paths.

- Workers should maintain physical distance during set-up to the extent possible.

- Stations and booths should be placed to create physical distance:

    o Between check-in stations.

    o Between voting booths.

    o Between the ballot box and queueing space.

- Booth placement for distance should not compromise the privacy of any voter.

- If feasible, create clear and separate directional entry and exit paths.

- Where voting sites are used as alternate return sites for mail ballots, drop-off options should be provided outside the voting location (ideal) or near the entrance. This will limit the number of people circulating through the voting location.
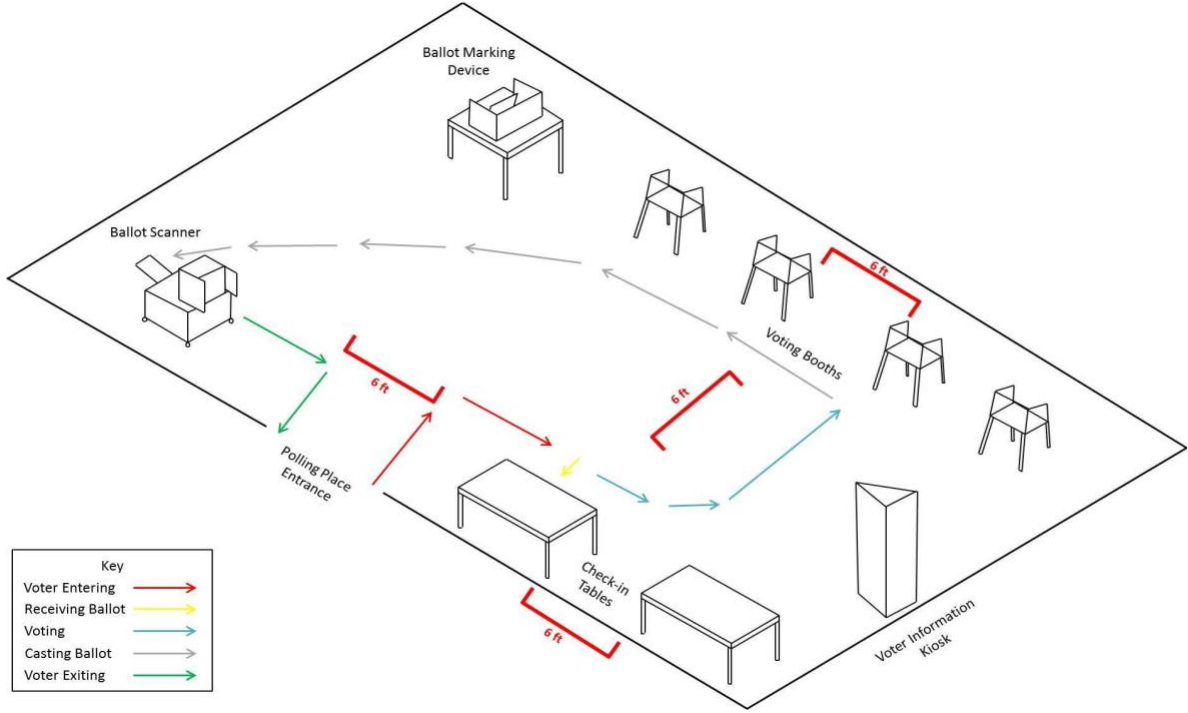
Signage and Visual Cues

- Use clear signage to indicate appropriate distances to maintain.

- Place markers on the floor to help voters maintain appropriate distance from each other (i.e., use colored tape at each 6-foot interval).

Other Distancing Considerations

- To the extent feasible, exclude non-essential visitors from voting locations.

    o Encourage voters to leave children at home.

    o Encourage observers to work in shifts rather than remaining present.

- Require voters and poll workers to avoid greeting others with physical contact.

Cleaning, Disinfection and Ventilation in the Voting Location

Counties should consider whether sites should have a Sanitation Station, and a dedicated staffer to welcome voters and orient them to Covid-19 safety procedures in the polling place.

Counties should consider deep cleaning voting sites before, during and after the November 3, 2020 General Election.

- Deep cleaning expenses are reimbursable under the new Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Counties should work with facility management and poll workers to address the three key areas from the Cleaning, Disinfection and Ventilation section above:

- Upgrading procedures followed by cleaning staff.

- Ensuring routine cleaning and disinfection by poll workers.

- Improving fresh air intake and limiting recirculation if possible.

Supplies

Counties should provide cleaning and disinfection supplies including:

- Hand-sanitizer sufficient for workers, for observers and for voters to use before and after voting.

  ○ Sanitizer should be available at each check-in station and at the exit.

- Disinfecting wipes or cleaning supplies appropriate to each item of equipment.

  ○ Guidelines specific to each voting system vendor are in Appendix A.

  ○ Guidelines for other types of equipment are given in this section below, by equipment type.

  ○ Failure to follow vendor guidance may void warranty or cause equipment failure.

- Enough wipes and/or cloths and disinfectant to disinfect surfaces and objects routinely.

Poll Workers and Cleaning

Poll workers should expect that routine cleaning is one of their job duties. A best practice is to create an additional position on the poll worker team with the singular responsibility of cleaning the facility and staffing a disinfection operation. All workers should be trained on routine cleaning and disinfection:

- Frequently disinfecting commonly used surfaces, such as door handles, voting booths, pens, styluses, activation cards and the voting equipment.

- Ensuring hands are dry (sanitizer fully evaporated) before handling ballots. This applies to workers and voters.

- Cleaning and disinfecting election equipment, as provided in Appendix A.

Voting Equipment

Clean commonly used surfaces on the voting equipment often. See vendor-specific information in Appendix A for cleaning of election equipment used by voters.

Electronic PollBooks

Clean the signature pad and stylus between each check-in and when switching e-pollbook users. See vendor-specific information in Appendix A for cleaning of election equipment.

If a printer is used with the e-pollbook, wipe the printer tray and buttons when loading printer paper. Never spray cleaner directly on the printer. See vendor-specific information in Appendix A for cleaning of election equipment.

Accessories and Voting Equipment for Voters with Disabilities

Special care should be taken in disinfecting equipment before use by voters with disabilities, because they may interact with the equipment in different ways, and some may have unique health vulnerabilities. Some items of concern:

- Accessibility controls for voting equipment should be cleaned before and after each use.

- Single-use disposable ear covers for device headphones should be used.

   - Replace covers after each use, washing hands before touching them.

Ballot-on-Demand Equipment

The exterior of ballot-on-demand equipment, including the body of the printer, can be wiped down with a disinfectant solution as frequently as is deemed appropriate.

Cleaning internal parts to ensure proper mechanical function is beyond the scope of this guide. As with other mechanical and electronic equipment, take care not to allow liquid inside, nor to apply it in quantity. Use damp but not wet cloths.

Monitors and Displays

Only use a cleaner intended for use on a screen or display. Do not use window cleaners, household cleaners nor any other cleaner not expressly recommended for screens or displays.

As with other mechanical and electronic equipment, take care not to allow cleaning liquid inside, nor to apply it in quantity. Use damp but not wet cloths. See vendor-specific information in Appendix A for cleaning of election equipment.

Peripherals

Wireless or USB keyboards, mice and trackpads can be cleaned using a gentle disinfectant solution. Do not get moisture in any openings or use aerosol sprays, solvents, abrasives or cleaners containing hydrogen peroxide. See vendor-specific information in Appendix A for cleaning of election equipment.

Curbside Voting

Where offered, curbside voting presents unique challenges in a COVID-19 setting because poll workers must carry materials and exchange them with the voter, approach the voter in a less familiar and controlled setting and the voter may have specific vulnerabilities to COVID-19.

In addition to all normal precautions outlined above, some considerations for poll workers who conduct curbside voting include:

- Putting gloves on before assembling the materials to be brought outside.

- Bringing hand-sanitizer for the voter to use before and after voting. (Also a face covering, if available.)

- Approaching the voter vehicle slowly, motioning to lower the window partially in order to talk through the process and remaining at six-foot distance until necessary in order to hand off materials.

- Wearing face coverings and asking the voter to do so if they are not.

- Maintaining physical distance to the extent possible, by approaching only briefly for necessary hand-offs of material and then moving back.

- Providing hand-sanitizer before materials have been exchanged, and again after the voted ballot and other materials are handed back.

Ballot Handling: Receiving & Processing

The expected expansion of vote-by-mail will keep voters safer, but it brings new challenges since it entails expanding staff and space devoted to the task while addressing COVID-19 safety. Election officials should develop plans for Ballot Receiving and Ballot Processing.

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Running a Safe Election in a Pandemic—Start to Finish

Ballot Receiving

Voted ballots come from multiple sources: ballots brought to the office by mail carriers, by voters or their representatives and from drop boxes throughout the county. Receiving ballots in office is similar to other public service responsibilities, and election officials should follow guidelines already detailed above for physical distancing, disinfection and other preventive measures.

Ballot retrieval from drop boxes requires teams of at least two designated ballot retrievers. New precautions are required to limit the risk of infection for these workers.

As with other duties, designated ballot retrievers should always wear face coverings and gloves, use hand sanitizer and wash their hands frequently. Since drop-box keys are essential security items, they should be signed in and out each day. Users should follow the disinfection guidelines for items touched by others.

The suggested physical distancing best practice for the designated ballot retrieval staff includes:

- Keeping staff pairings consistent from day to day, if possible.

- Traveling to each site in separate vehicles.

- Staying within sight of each other when traveling to and from ballot drop-boxes, since arriving at a drop-box before a partner creates a ballot security risk.

  o Keeping the key in the trailing vehicle is best.

  o Partners should each have cell phones and should exchange numbers.

  o If either vehicle loses sightline contact, both should stop and attempt to reach the other.

- If traveling with two separate vehicles is not feasible:

  o Consider using a larger vehicle, such as a van, to support physical distancing, and maximize fresh air flow in the vehicle.

  o Pay closer attention to consistently pairing the same workers from day to day.

  o Place ballot retrieval staff as far apart in the vehicle as possible.

  o Ask staff at start and end of shift to confirm that both partners follow face covering guidelines.

Ballot Processing

The CDC has advised that the risk of contamination from processing paper ballots and envelopes is low if proper hand hygiene and other precautions are taken. The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) has seconded that reassurance, even taking into account that most envelopes, including ballot envelopes, are sealed by licking. USPS says the risk of transmission through mail is low because mail is exposed to many different conditions of pressure, weight and abrasion while in transit. Contact with ballot envelopes dropped off by voters is also considered a low risk.

Nevertheless, poll workers and observers should still follow all procedures and precautions in this guidance document. In particular:

- Always use disposable gloves when handling ballot envelopes.

- Follow all guidelines for glove use outlined in the earlier section on PPE.

In addition, election officials should consider how many additional workers will be needed to process expanded mail voting, how much additional space is required to allow physical distancing and how to manage necessary exchanges of physical materials to minimize how often workers are brought into close contact.

- Consider whether the traditional space for ballot processing has appropriate ventilation for COVID-19 safety, since as a small operation, ballot processing has often been done in basements or small mail rooms. Find a new, larger room if necessary.

- Use staging tables where bins, forms and other materials can be left by one staffer, then picked up by another, while maintaining physical distance.

- Consider how to maintain distance while completing tasks that require partners for ballot security reasons.
  - Maintain consistent staff pairings from day to day whenever possible.

Running a Safe Election in a Pandemic—Start to Finish

Election Observation

Election officials can mitigate the health impacts of observation in many ways:

- Because observers act in a collective role, officials can limit the number of observers at one time, taking care to respect the needs of political parties to protect their interests and address their requirements.

- Observers should use face coverings, and in many states are required to. Election officials are encouraged to follow state/local public health guidance, and stay current with changes.

- Observers must maintain physical distancing of six feet.

- Observers can be asked to take such other measures as hand hygiene, cough etiquette and general respect for cleanliness and sanitation.

- Where observers prove unwilling to comply with guidelines, election officials should work with the party, candidate or organization to resolve differences.

- Officials should consider ways to minimize interaction between observers and poll workers. Emailing guidelines to candidates and campaigns ahead of time can help.

- Observation is primarily an audio-visual activity, and video, particularly if supplemented by audio, may be an appropriate substitute for physical attendance during election processes that occur outside of the polling place.

Observing Central Processes

Efforts to mitigate the COVID-19 impact of observation will be different in centrally handled processes and in scattered voting locations.

A well-designed video program or live-stream may provide a sufficient alternative, or a way to supplement in-person observation by a small number of observers, while allowing a larger set of observers to watch from a conference room of from home. Consider it for any or all of these central processes:

- Logic and accuracy testing.

- Vote-by-mail processing before, during and after Election Day.

- Post-election canvass.

- Provisional vote processing.

- One-percent manual tally.

- Risk-limiting audits.

- Recounts.

If video is not feasible, make allowance for the space and personal disinfection needs of observers as you build out these work areas.

Because vote-by-mail ballots will make up a much greater percentage of the results than they have in the past, requests to observe mail processing are also likely to increase. Election officials should make every possible effort to accommodate all requests to observe mail processing, whether by video or in person, since that will do the most to help allay concerns.

Observing in Voting Locations

Observation in voting locations brings additional complications. Even with a limited number of early voting sites, there are likely too many activities across too broad an area for video to allow adequate observation. Providing video at all election day voting locations isn't feasible.

Election officials should give detailed guidance to poll workers on how they should manage observation in their site:

- Assess how many observers can be safely accommodated in each site.

- Provide that information to poll workers and observers ahead of time.

- Give simple messages for poll workers to use if more observers seek entry than is permitted, or if observers refuse to comply with health guidelines.

- Train poll workers in how to move such situations up the chain of authority, since they may require notification of interested parties and even law enforcement involvement.

Election Training

Training elections workers to follow administrative guidance and manage elections fairly and efficiently is always a critical and challenging task. Given the vulnerabilities to COVID-19 of age cohorts that have traditionally supplied large numbers of poll workers, election officials may be training more inexperienced poll workers than ever before. A safe training plan should utilize all

of the principles listed in this document to protect poll workers during in-person, hands-on and/or remote training sessions.

Election officials can mitigate the health risks of in-person training in multiple ways.

Many technological aids to training already exist and are currently used by election officials. Online training can supplement, and in some cases replace in-person training. Software that allows simulations of physical action using drag-and-drop actions (i.e., pulling a ballot across the screen to the scanner) can be valuable.

Video conferencing training can be an appropriate substitute for physical attendance during training.

Appendix A: Other Information Resources

In addition to the guidance outlined above, election officials are encouraged to stay up-to-date with the most recent information possible regarding COVID-19. Counties are encouraged regularly visit the following websites for more information:

COVID-19 General Health and Safety Links

Centers for Disease Control (CDC):
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

CDC page on PPE, with guidelines for proper use of face coverings
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/using-ppe.html

CDC signage page, with hundreds of COVID19-related signs for download
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html

World Health Organization (WHO):
www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

Election-Specific Advice from Agencies and Institutions

U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC):
https://www.eac.gov/election-officials/coronavirus-covid-19-resources

U.S. Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP):
https://www.fvap.gov/COVID-19

U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Recommendations for Election Polling Locations:
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/election-polling-locations.html

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA):
www.cisa.gov/covid-19-and-elections

National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS):
www.nass.org/resources/issue-briefing-election-emergencies-covid-19

National Association of State Election Directors (NASED):
www.nased.org/covid19

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL):
www.ncsl.org/research/elections-andcampaigns/state-action-on-covid-19-and-elections.aspx

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Election Data and Science Lab:
https://electionlab.mit.edu/elections-and-covid-19

University of Rhode Island "URI Votes" project - Voting Site Design page:
https://web.uri.edu/urivotes/tools/2d/

This document was created as part of the Election Superheroes Project, with the help of current and former election officials around the country, for the benefit of all current election officials. Election officials are superheroes!

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Appendix B: Preventing COVID-19 Posters

See following pages.

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Voters Must

Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

6 ft

Next voter step over

Wear a face covering
if you have one

Stay 6 feet away
from poll workers and other voters

Follow any rules
inside the polling place,
including all markings, posted rules
and poll worker instructions

6 ft
(Neutral Space)

Use neutral space
on the check-in table for materials
in order to maintain social distance

Use personal or provided hand
sanitizer after transactions
with poll workers or any voting device,
but not before or at any point while in
possession of an optical scan ballot

Sanitizer can damage paper ballots
and render them unreadable

Poll Workers Must

Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Stay 6 feet away
from other poll workers and voters

Wear a face covering

Wash or sanitize hands frequently
including after arriving to work, using
the restroom, blowing your nose or
sneezing, and prior to departing work

Sanitize items
such as pens, pollbooks, and voting
booths regularly

Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Elections Staff Must:

Work at least 6 feet apart
from other staff

Use partitions if 6 feet separation is not possible

Wash your hands often
with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing

Wear gloves
(when appropriate)

Stay home
if you are sick

Avoid close contact with people who are sick

Wear a face mask
You could spread COVID-19 to others even if you don't feel sick

Regularly sanitize
work items such as keyboards, pens, and any shared materials