

Safe District Electoral Offices - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

September 21, 2020

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Introduction

All government (local, regional, provincial, federal) functions or services, including those provided by agencies, crown corporations, contractors or service providers, and government owned or leased buildings are [designated as essential services](#). This includes staff who work in district electoral offices (DEO offices) established in each electoral district in the province during a provincial general election or by-election. DEO offices are staffed by election officials and office staff, are workplaces that operate for approximately two months, and are open to the public to provide electoral services.

Critical to Elections BC's ability to administer a safe election during the current pandemic is this this *Safe DEO Offices – COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan* that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures necessary to maintain business continuity while reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in district electoral offices. This safety plan is aligned with the WorkSafeBC requirement for employers to develop [COVID-19 Safety Plans](#) including the necessary policies to manage the workplace during the pandemic.

Elections BC's COVID-19 safety plans include workplace policies to address:

- A description of the minimum safety measures that must be in place in each respective district electoral office and how workers can be kept safe in adjusted working conditions,
- who can be at the district electoral office, and,
- how to address illness that arises at the district electoral office.

These safety plans include work protocols that minimize the impact of a potential positive case of COVID-19, and mean that if the protocols are followed the workplace does not need to be closed. These protocols ensure business continuity for the essential services provided in DEO offices during the administration of an election.

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DEO offices must be established and operate in accordance with current public health guidelines. At a minimum, this means the following measures must be in place:

- Occupancy limits must be identified and enforced based on the ability to control risks in the workspace. Primary controls are ensuring adequate physical distancing throughout the voting place and barriers where physical distance is not possible.
- Staff must make an oral declaration of health to their supervisor each day based on symptom criteria set by the BC CDC. Staff members who have symptoms of COVID-19, who have tested positive for COVID-19, who have had recent close contacts with a COVID-19 positive person, or who have returned from travel outside of Canada within 14 days must not attend the workplace.
- Appropriate signage (supplied by Elections BC) must be placed at the entryway informing staff and visitors of the occupancy load and that entry is prohibited if a person is showing symptoms of COVID-19. Additional signage should be placed as necessary in common work areas.
- Physical distancing of 2-metres/6-feet between individuals in the DEO office is required and must be marked out in the voting place and in queuing areas outside.
- Each public reception desk will be set up with a transparent barrier to protect election officials and voters. Staff at the reception desk may wear a mask. Staff working in the public access space are required to wear masks and visors when not working behind a barrier (while the public is present).
- Hand sanitizer is available for use by visitors, election officials and office staff. All visitors will be asked to sanitize their hands upon entry and exit, and staff will sanitize their hands regularly throughout the workday.

Risk Identification

Risks for the transmission of COVID-19 in traditional DEO offices include the following:

- Direct transmission via respiratory droplets in the air between:
 - office workers in the workplace
 - election officials attending classroom training sessions
 - candidates and election officials during nominations
 - voters standing in line
 - voters and the election officials who are serving them
 - election officials working at the same station as each other
 - scrutineers and election officials at the same station
 - job seekers and other inquiries
- Indirect transmission via respiratory droplets that have landed on high touch points, including:
 - door handles
 - paper employment applications and candidate nomination documents
 - voting books signed by hundreds of voters throughout the day
 - ballots and other election materials passed between voters and election officials
 - ballot marking pens or pencils and voting booth surfaces where voters mark ballots
 - touch fixtures and horizontal surfaces in washrooms

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The risk mitigation protocols set out below either modify procedures to eliminate the risk scenarios, or mitigate the risk of transmission through a hierarchy of protections.

Risk Mitigation Protocols

This safety plan uses the hierarchy of protections recommended by the B.C. government and WorkSafeBC. This hierarchy prioritizes a first level of contact elimination/physical distancing, followed by engineering controls, administrative controls and personal protective equipment, as a means of identifying which adaptations are necessary for reducing COVID-19 transmission hazards. Cleaning and hygiene practices to reduce transmission risk are also set out.

First-level protection (elimination/substitution): Limit the number of people at the workplace and ensure physical distance wherever possible

DEO offices perform functions that require staff to be present in the office and that the office be open to the public. Because voting is a constitutional right, the number of individuals participating in the electoral process province-wide cannot be reduced. Rather, Elections BC's first-level protections for DEO offices focus on reducing the number of individuals in a DEO office at any given time by providing more opportunities to vote, and by streamlining administrative processes. First-level protections also include measures to facilitate physical distancing in the DEO office.

Elections BC's first-level protections are as follows:

- Capacity for mail-in voting has been increased, and a public information campaign to inform voters of this option.
- More advance voting opportunities are available, to spread voters out between more locations and days.
- DEO office selection criteria prioritizes locations with high occupancy limits to maximize the amount of space within a DEO office, and office work space that is physically separated from the public-access voting space. High-ceilings (i.e., large volumes) are also prioritized.
- DEO office occupancy limits are calculated on a location-by-location basis. Office workers occupy their own workstation and maintain at least 2-metre/6-foot distance. Voters may occupy unencumbered spaces at a rate of one voter per 54 square feet in public access spaces. Voters in excess of the occupancy limits are required to line up outside.
- The voting station staffing model has been changed so that voting can be administered by one election official rather than two.
- Candidate representatives will be limited to observing voting processes from a designated area and may not move freely within the DEO office. The number of candidate representatives that may be present is limited based on space availability (minimum 2).
- 2-metre/6-foot physical distancing markings are set out on the DEO office floor using tape, and tables in election official training classrooms spaced apart, to assist with enforcing physical distancing.
- Recruiting, hiring and processing of employment information for office staff and election officials occurs virtually.
- Where operationally feasible, training for office staff and election officials is delivered virtually.

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Second-level protection (engineering controls): Barriers and partitions

Elections BC's second-level protections are as follows:

- After prioritizing physical space, DEO office selection criteria prioritize locations with HVAC systems that maximize fresh air intake/exhaust of inside air. Sites with doors and windows that can be opened to ventilate the voting and office spaces are also prioritized.
- Transparent barriers are installed on the top of public reception desks. The barriers are designed to separate the breathing zones of a standing voter and sitting election official.
- Election officials will hand ballots, other documents and single-use pencils to voters through a pass-through gap in the bottom of the barrier.
- The transparent barriers utilized are self-standing, portable units that do not introduce new risks to the workplace.

Third level protection (administrative controls): Rules and guidelines

In addition to the rules and guidelines that Elections BC has adjusted to allow for first-level protections (lower occupancy and physical distancing), rules are in place to prevent infected individuals from entering the DEO office, and to reduce the contact intensity of interactions within the DEO office.

Elections BC's third-level protections are as follows:

- Staff must make an oral declaration of health to their supervisor each day based on symptom criteria set by the BC CDC.
- Staff and voters experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, who have tested positive for COVID-19, who have had recent close contacts with a COVID-19 positive person, or who have returned from travel outside of Canada within 14 days are not permitted to enter the DEO office. Other voting arrangements will be available to these individuals.
- Signage will be in place reminding voters of occupancy limits, distancing requirements, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene requirements.
- Candidates no longer need to collect 75 hand written signatures to submit nomination documents.
- Voters no longer need to sign a declaration in the voting book. They may now make the declaration orally.
- Voters no longer need to sign an advance voting certificate. The relevant information is stored digitally instead.
- Voters are invited to use their own pen or pencil to mark their ballot. Single-use pencils are provided to voters by the voting office as needed.
- Voters are no longer asked to return their ballot to the election official for counterfoil removal for advance and general voting. Voters will be asked to remove and discard the ballot counterfoil themselves, after the election official has visually confirmed that the ballot is the same one issued to the voter. Election officials at absentee voting are still required to handle the ballot and counterfoil after it is handled by the voter and will therefore sanitize their hands more frequently.
- Washrooms will be reserved for staff use; alcohol-based hand sanitizer will be available for voters to sanitize their hands.

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- Shared dishes and utensils must not be used. Staff will be required to bring their own drink containers, dishes and utensils.

Fourth-level protection: Personal protective equipment

Elections BC's fourth-level protections are as follows:

- Election officials, including those attending training classes, are required to wear masks in the DEO office.
- Election officials behind barriers may remove their masks temporarily to assist voters (e.g., for voters who read lips in order to communicate).
- Election officials whose stations are not behind barriers are required to wear masks and face shields while working in the public access portion of the DEO office. Election officials not behind barriers may remove their facemasks temporarily to assist voters only if 2-metre/6-foot distancing can be maintained throughout the interaction.
- Candidate representative must wear masks while observing the conduct of voting in DEO offices.
- Voters will be encouraged to wear their own masks when they come to vote and will not be asked to remove their masks while voting.
- Disposable masks are made available for voters to use in the DEO office.
- Gloves will be available in the DEO office for staff who choose to use them for certain tasks (e.g. counting ballots, sanitization routines).

Cleaning and hygiene practices:

Elections BC's cleaning and hygiene practices are as follows:

- DEO office surfaces are cleaned before the DEO office opens to the public each day.
- Hand sanitizer pump bottles are available at the DEO office entrance and exit, and at voting stations. Visitors are asked to sanitize their hands upon entering and before leaving.
- Office staff and election officials are instructed to sanitize their hands regularly throughout the day. Sanitizing instructions are included in training materials and quick reference guides.
- Office staff and election officials are instructed to clean high touch points regularly throughout the day. Cleaning guidelines are included in training materials and quick reference guides, and includes surface cleaning, surface disinfection and restocking of sanitization supplies.
- Single-use pencils are collected in paper bags as voters leave the voting station and are sanitized before reuse (only as necessary).
- DEO office surfaces are cleaned after voting and counting have concluded.
- IT equipment used in DEO offices is cleaned and disinfected using isopropyl alcohol wipes before and after use. IT equipment for voting places is distributed from DEO offices and returned each day for cleaning and sanitization.

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Training plan

Research has shown that blended learning, an approach that combines online learning and face-to-face learning into one training experience, increases learner engagement and knowledge retention.

Elections BC's office staff election official training uses a blended learning approach that provides learners with the background, context and 'big picture' of an election event in online courses, followed by the opportunity to practice the tasks and duties specific to their role.

The office staff and election official online training will be updated to include information on COVID-19, how it is transmitted, and the risk mitigation protocols set out above to ensure that staff are aware of how to work safely within the DEO office.

Orientation for staff in DEO offices

Self-directed learning – same regardless of work location/role

- Background information on COVID-19 (e.g. signs/symptoms/transmission etc)
- Standard Precautions for COVID-19, including:
 - o Cough and Sneeze Etiquette
 - o Hand washing
 - o Physical distancing
 - o Staying home when sick
 - o Cleaning and hygiene requirements
- Employee responsibility to follow safe work procedures and report any areas where protocols are not effective to their supervisor

Site-specific orientation – in person

- District Electoral Officers to provide site-specific walk-through of office on first day
- Identify:
 - o Entrances, exits, pathways
 - o Hazards
 - o COVID-specific protocols for common areas (e.g. elevators, washrooms, stairwells, etc.)
 - o Location of signage and hygiene supplies