

Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

September 21, 2020

Contents

Introduction	1
Risk Identification.....	2
Risk Mitigation Protocols	3
First-level protection (elimination/substitution): Limit the number of people at the workplace and ensure physical distance wherever possible.....	3
Second-level protection (engineering controls): Barriers and partitions.....	3
Third level protection (administrative controls): Rules and guidelines	4
Fourth-level protection: Personal protective equipment.....	4
Cleaning and hygiene practices:	5
Training plan	6
Orientation for new workers in voting places	6

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 essential services](#). This includes services performed by staff who work in voting places during a provincial general election or by-election. Voting places are staffed by election officials and are workplaces that operate for one day, with advance voting places being open for up to seven days, 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 *Safe Voting Places – 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 voting places. This safety plan is aligned with the WorkSafe BC 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 plan includes workplace policies to address:

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

This safety plan includes 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 voting places during the administration of an election.

Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

September 21, 2020

Voting places 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 voting place is required and must be marked out in the voting place and in queuing areas outside.
- Each voting station will be set up with a transparent barrier to protect both election officials and voters. Election officials are required to wear masks. 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 voters and election officials. Voters will be asked to sanitize their hands upon entry and exit, and election officials will sanitize their hands regularly throughout the workday.

Risk Identification

Risks for the transmission of COVID-19 in traditional voting places include the following:

- Direct transmission via respiratory droplets in the air between:
 - 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
- Indirect transmission via respiratory droplets that have landed on high touch points, including:
 - door handles
 - 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

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.

Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

September 21, 2020

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

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

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 will be used.
- More advance voting opportunities are available, to spread voters out between more locations and days.
- Voting place selection criteria prioritizes locations with high occupancy limits, to maximize the amount of space within a voting place. High-ceilings (i.e., large volumes) are also prioritized.
- Voting place occupancy limits are calculated on a location-by-location basis. Voters may occupy unencumbered spaces at a rate of one voter per 54 square feet. 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 voting place. 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 voting place floor using tape, and 1-3 additional information officers (depending on size and capacity of location) have been hired to assist with enforcing physical distancing.

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

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

- After prioritizing physical space, voting place 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 space are also prioritized.
- Transparent barriers are installed on the top of voting station tables. The barriers are designed to separate the breathing zones of a standing voter and sitting election official.

Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

September 21, 2020

- 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 voting place, and to reduce the contact intensity of interactions within the voting place.

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 voting place. 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.
- 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 officer 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 election official use; alcohol-based hand sanitizer will be available for voters.
- 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 whose stations are behind barriers are required to wear masks while working in the voting place. 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 voting place. Election officials not behind barriers may remove their

Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

September 21, 2020

facemasks temporarily to assist voters only if 2-metre/6-foot distancing can be maintained throughout the interaction.

- Elections officials must wear masks during in-person training.
- Candidate representative must wear masks while observing the conduct of voting in voting places.
- 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 voting place. Information Officers recommend but do not require voters to use masks.
- Gloves will be available in the voting place for election officials 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:

- Voting place surfaces are cleaned before the voting place opens to the public.
- Hand sanitizer pump bottles are available at the voting place entrance and exit, and at voting stations. Voters are asked to sanitize their hands upon entering and before leaving.
- Election officials are instructed to sanitize their hands regularly throughout the day. Sanitizing instructions are included in training materials and quick reference guides.
- 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. The additional Information Officer(s) hired at each voting place will assist with cleaning routines in addition to their client support role.
- Single-use pencils are collected in paper bags as voters leave the voting station. These can be sanitized before reuse (if reuse is necessary).
- Voting place surfaces are cleaned after voting and counting have concluded.

Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

September 21, 2020

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 election official training uses a blended learning approach that provides learners with the background, context and 'big picture' of an election event in the Election Official Training online course, followed by the opportunity to practice the tasks and duties specific to their role in a classroom environment.

The Election Official Training online course will be updated to include information on COVID-19, how it is transmitted, and the risk mitigation protocols set out above to ensure that election officials are aware of how to administer voting safely within the voting place.

Orientation for new workers in voting places

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:
 - Cough and Sneeze Etiquette
 - Hand washing
 - Physical distancing
 - Staying home when sick
- Employee responsibility to follow Safe Work Procedures (SWPs) and report any areas where physical distancing protocols are not effective to their supervisor
- Cleaning and hygiene requirements in voting places

Site-specific walk-through

- SVO to provide site-specific walk-through of office on first day
- Identify:
 1. Entrances, exits, pathways
 2. Hazards
 3. COVID-specific protocols for common areas (e.g. elevators, washrooms, stairwells, etc.)