

Safe District Electoral Offices - Communicable Disease Prevention Plan

August 4, 2022

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Introduction

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 is this this *Safe DEO Offices – Communicable Disease Plan* that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures necessary to maintain business continuity while reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases in district electoral offices.

This safety plan is aligned with the WorkSafeBC requirement for employers to have communicable disease prevention plans in place. This plan includes workplace policies to address:

- A description of the minimum safety measures that must be in place in a 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 a DEO office during the administration of an election.

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:**

- Identifying and **managing areas of crowding and congestion** in the workplace. Primary controls are ensuring adequate physical distancing throughout the district electoral office, adequate ventilation and indoor air circulation, 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](#) or [other](#)

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[communicable diseases](#), who have tested positive for COVID-19, or are required to [self-isolate](#) must not attend the workplace.

- **Appropriate signage** (supplied by Elections BC) must be placed at the entryway informing staff and visitors of the safety protocols in place 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 recommended and should be marked out in the voting place within the DEO office and in queuing areas outside.
- The public reception desk will be set up with a **transparent barrier** to protect election officials and voters. Staff at the reception desk may choose to wear a mask while seated at their station.
- Election officials and staff in the district electoral office must **wear a mask** at all times while working.
- **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 communicable diseases such as COVID-19 in 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
 - scrutineers and election officials at the same station
 - job seekers and other inquiries
- **Indirect transmission** via respiratory droplets that collect in enclosed spaces when there is not enough fresh air or that have landed on high touch points.

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.

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First-level protection (elimination/substitution): Avoid crowding and congestion 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 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:

- 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.
- To avoid crowding and congestion, voters may at times be required to line up outside the district electoral office.
- Candidate representatives may be limited to observing voting processes from a designated area and may not be able to move freely within the DEO office.
- 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 as much as possible.
- Capacity for mail-in voting has been increased, with a public information campaign to inform voters of this option.

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

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 ballot-marking pens 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.

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Third level protection (administrative controls): Rules and guidelines

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, or who are required to self-isolate are not permitted to enter the DEO office. Other voting arrangements will be available to these voters.
- Signage will be in place reminding voters of the above entry rules, as well as, distancing requirements, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene requirements.
- DEO office staff will participate in a rapid antigen testing program for symptomatic workers.
- All DEO office staff must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.
- Washrooms will be reserved for staff use; alcohol-based hand sanitizer will be available for voters to sanitize their hands.
- Sanitizing wipes are provided to staff to periodically sanitize their work stations and other high-touch surfaces in common work areas.

Fourth-level protection: Personal protective equipment

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

- Election officials and staff in the district electoral office must wear a mask:
 - While in or transiting indoor public spaces such reception
 - When serving or assisting clients/the public in meeting rooms, waiting areas, lobbies, etc., unless there is a barrier in place between the client/public and staff
 - When transiting or working in other areas of the workplace including staff-only areas such as hallways, corridors, stairwells, etc.
 - In meeting and training rooms, even with reduced capacities and 2 metre distancing
 - In lunchrooms, break rooms, kitchens, etc., except while seated and eating or drinking
 - During all staff-to-staff interactions if less than 2 metres distancing
- Masks are not required when DEO office staff are at their workstations – assuming that 2 metres distance from other staff is maintained or there are barriers or dividers in place.
- Election officials attending training classes are required to wear masks in the DEO office.
- DEO offices are “mask-friendly”. All staff may choose to wear a mask at any time in any area of the workplace (including when seated at their workstation).
- When choosing what mask to wear, staff must choose a mask with appropriate fit and filtration. This means that the mask:
 - fits tightly with no gaps
 - is made of three layers of fabric, including two layers of tightly-woven fabric, with a filter or filter fabric between layers.

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- Staff are not permitted to wear homemade or cloth masks on their own because these masks may not have adequate fit or filtration.
- Election officials and district electoral office staff should wear, at a minimum, a certified 3-layer medical mask when at work. Elections BC will provide a supply of certified 3-layer medical masks in the district electoral office. District electoral office staff and election officials can also choose to wear their own equivalent masks.
- Elections BC strongly recommends that staff exceed the standard 3-layer medical mask by wearing a respirator mask such as a N95. Elections BC will provide a supply of N95 masks in the district electoral office for staff to wear while working. District electoral office staff and election officials can also choose to wear their own equivalent N95 masks.
- Office staff and election officials behind barriers may remove their masks temporarily to assist voters (e.g., for voters who read lips in order to communicate).
- Office staff and 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 are strongly encouraged to 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 and other visitors 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:

- 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.

Training plan

The office staff and election official training will be updated to include information on communicable disease prevention, and the risk mitigation protocols set out above to ensure that staff work safely within the DEO office.

Orientation for staff in DEO offices will cover the contents of this safety plan including:

- Cough and sneeze etiquette, hand washing
- Physical distancing
- Staying home when sick
- Hygiene requirements
- Use of masks

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- Employee responsibility to follow safe work procedures and report any areas where protocols are not effective to their supervisor

District Electoral Officers will provide a site-specific walk-through of the DEO office on first day to identify:

- Entrances, exits, pathways
- Hazards
- COVID-specific protocols for common areas (e.g. elevators, washrooms, stairwells, etc.)
- Location of signage and hygiene supplies