

Safety Measures to Prevent Against Transmission of COVID-19 at Polling Stations

June 11, 2020

To help prevent spread of COVID-19 at polling stations, procedures and supplies should be in place to encourage proper hand and respiratory hygiene as well as routine cleaning and disinfection. This guidance is provided for any public or private facility that operates as a polling site to incorporate into their facility protocols.

Background

On March 7, 2020, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo issued Executive Order 202, declaring a state of emergency in response to COVID-19. To minimize further spread and to ensure the health and safety of poll workers and the general public, social distancing and frequent cleaning measures should be put in place at all polling stations.

General Precautions:

- Any individual who displays symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should be encouraged to stay at home. Polling sites should provide alternative voting options or locations for voters who may be sick (examples provided below).
- Polling sites should have bathrooms that are adequately supplied with soap, water, and disposable hand drying materials to allow for individuals to wash their hands.
- Poll workers should not share food or beverages. Workers should be encouraged to bring their own food and beverages. Adequate space should be reserved for workers to observe social distancing while eating meals and taking breaks.

Considerations Before Entering the Polling Site

People with COVID-19 can have had a wide range of reported symptoms, including but not limited to cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell.

- **Polling sites** must have a protocol, clear instructions, and a greeter at the entrance of the polling location.
- **Poll workers** must be screened before they enter the polling site and not be permitted to enter if they:
 - Tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 10 days,
 - Have been in close or proximate contact with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days,
 - Are experiencing any symptoms related to COVID-19,
 - Have a fever greater than or equal to 100.0°F.
- **Voters** must be provided clear instructions, before entering the polling station, about protocols concerning:
 - Individuals who would otherwise be restricted from accessing public areas, including those who:
 - Have symptoms of COVID-19 including fever greater than or equal to 100.0°F, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pains, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell.
 - Have tested positive for COVID-19 and have not been cleared by a medical professional or the local health department to appear in public.
 - Had close or proximate contact with someone testing positive for COVID-19 within the past 14 days.
 - Alternative voting options for those restricted individuals, which may include designated areas for affected individuals to vote outside of the polling place or

acceptance of absentee ballots at the polling site consistent with Executive Order 202.15 and consistent with Election Law.

- Poll workers cannot mandate that voters complete a health screen or provide contact information but may encourage voters to do so. Poll workers may provide an option for voters to provide contact information so they can be logged and contacted for contact tracing, if necessary.

Stop the Spread Posters

Signs reinforcing social distancing and good hand and respiratory hygiene should be posted in prominent locations throughout the polling station. Examples of signs that may be used are available on the Department of Health (DOH) website at <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home>. Alternative languages should also be made available.

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene stations must be provided and maintained at the polling site. Signage with hand hygiene procedures must be posted in prominent locations promoting good hand hygiene practices.

- Poll workers and voters should wash their hands for 20 seconds with soap and water:
 - Before and after eating;
 - After sneezing, coughing, or nose blowing;
 - After using the restroom;
 - Before handling food;
 - After touching or cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated; and
 - After using shared equipment and supplies, including electronic equipment such as keyboards, mice, writing instruments, phones, and voting equipment.
- If soap and water are not readily available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol may be used. However, hand sanitizer is not effective on visibly soiled hands. Hands that are visibly soiled must be washed with soap and water.
- Hand sanitizing stations must be located near polling equipment with signage encouraging use before and after voting.
 - Consider placing hand sanitizer at the entrance of the polling site, at each polling station, and at the exit of the facility.

Respiratory Hygiene

Signage promoting respiratory hygiene procedures should be posted in prominent locations.

- On April 12, 2020, Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order 202.16, directing essential businesses to provide employees, who are present in the workplace, with a face covering, at no-cost, that must be used when in direct contact with customers or members of the public during the course of their work.
- On April 15, 2020, Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order 202.17, directing that any individual who is over age two and able to medically tolerate a face-covering must cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face-covering when in a public place and unable to maintain, or when not maintaining, social distance.
- Poll workers and voters should be reminded to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or the corner of elbow, dispose of soiled tissues immediately after use, and perform hand hygiene.

Social Distancing

Signage promoting social distancing procedures should be posted in prominent locations.

- Polling sites must limit voter presence to 50% of the maximum occupancy for the area as set by the certificate of occupancy.

- Poll workers and voters must maintain a distance of at least six feet to the greatest extent possible. When a distance of less than six feet is required to perform an activity within the polling location, a face covering must be worn.
- Social distancing of at least six feet must be maintained while voters wait in line. Poll workers should plan the flow of traffic through the poll site and utilize markers on the ground to ensure that voters are minimally six feet apart. Consider designating a separate entrance and exit from the polling site.

Preventative Actions to Reduce Exposures

- **Encourage voting through absentee ballots.** In light of the COVID-19 state of emergency, voters have been mailed absentee ballot applications. Voters should be encouraged to vote through absentee ballot in order to reduce in-person density.
- **Limiting locations near higher-risk populations.** Boards of elections should review the assignment of polling locations for Election Day and early voting to find alternative voting locations away from hospitals, nursing homes, adult care facilities, and other areas with concentrations of individuals at higher risk for COVID-19.
- **Encourage social distancing**
 - Encourage mail-in methods of voting, as allowed.
 - Encourage early voting and extended voting hours to spread out crowds.
 - Encourage voters to arrive at off-peak times. For example, if voter crowds are lighter mid-morning, advertise that in advance to the community.
- **Require Face Coverings**
 - Everyone at the polling station over age two and who are able to medically tolerate a face-covering must wear one at all times at voter polling stations. Voters should be reminded of this requirement upon entrance. Poll workers are prohibited from requesting or requiring medical or other documentation from an individual who declines to wear a face covering due to a medical or other health condition that prevents such usage.
 - If a voter refuses to wear a mask, poll workers should consider providing the voter the opportunity to cast a ballot using any alternative voting locations or methods available at the poll site, if available. Otherwise, the voter should be allowed to vote normally, and poll workers should follow safety and cleaning protocols.
 - To ensure voter access, polling sites should be prepared to provide disposable face coverings to any voter who does not have their own face covering.
 - Polling locations should consider providing an isolated, separate area in which poll workers may assist a voter that is unable to wear a mask. Poll workers must be supplied with and wear appropriate personal protective equipment to assist such voters.

Routine Cleaning

Routine cleaning and disinfection should be ongoing and occur at least daily. Time should be allocated for individuals to routinely clean and disinfect. Frequently touched surfaces must be cleaned and disinfected more frequently.

Polling sites should ensure they have adequate cleaning and disinfection supplies to support routine cleaning efforts. Refer to the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) [list of products](#) registered in New York State identified by the EPA as effective against COVID-19.

Considerations for Writing Utensils

Consider using disposable pens or pencils, or clean and disinfect pens and pencils between use. Styli must be cleaned and disinfected between use.

Considerations for Voting Equipment

- Clean and disinfect voting machines, touch screens, and other voting equipment by following [manufacturer instructions](#) after use and/or provide hand hygiene stations for use before and after touching the machine. Gloves may also be provided.
- Consider using alcohol-based wipes or spray containing at least 60% alcohol to clean voting machine buttons and touch screens. Use of alcohol-based products may reduce risk of damage to sensitive voting machine components.
- Voting equipment should be frequently cleaned to prevent possible exposure.

Recommendations for Processing Mail-in Ballots

- Poll workers handling mail-in ballots should be provided with gloves and face coverings.
- Facilities where mail-in ballots are being counted must prominently post signage reminding workers to practice good hand hygiene. These facilities must also provide access to soap and water, as well as alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Areas where mail-in ballots are being counted should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice per day.

More Information:

New York State Department of Health's COVID-19 Webpage:
<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home>

Centers for Disease Control and Preventing Webpage:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

Special Ballots for Emergency Responders (Election Law Section 11-308):
<https://www.elections.ny.gov/NYSBOE/download/law/2019NYElectionLaw.html>

Examples of frequently touched surfaces:

- Light switches;
- Handrails;
- Doorknobs and handles;
- Desks, tables, and chairs;
- Handles on equipment (e.g., carts);
- Shared telephones;
- Shared computers, keyboards, mice, and other electronics;
- Pens, pencils, styli, and other writing utensils;
- Voting machines and e-poll books;
- All kitchen and restroom surfaces.