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Guidance for Preventing Spread of COVID-19 in Election Polling Locations

Public Act 101-0642 Section 2B-35(a) requires election authorities to comply with early voting and election day safety and health practices established in written guidance by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

I. Background

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus that has emerged and caused coronavirus disease (abbreviated as COVID-19). COVID-19 spreads easily from person-to-person via respiratory droplets. Key measures to prevent transmission include the use of face coverings, maintaining physical distance of 6 feet or greater, and frequent hand washing.

II. Purpose

This guidance provides a framework for safe operations of election polling locations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

III. Definitions

Community settings (congregate settings) are mostly non-health care settings visited by the general public. Examples include election polling locations, households, daycares, and businesses.

Cleaning is the removal of dirt and germs from surfaces. Cleaning alone does not kill germs, but it does decrease the number of germs and spread of infection.

Disinfecting uses chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. Disinfecting after cleaning further reduces any risk of spreading infection.

Noncompliant voter is a voter who either refuses or for other reasons does not wear a face covering within or around the polling location.

Vulnerable populations are people at higher risk from COVID-19, and this group includes older adults and people who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease.

IV. Polling Location Plans

- a. Every local election authority is required to develop a written COVID-19 prevention plan for each polling place in its jurisdiction. Prevention plans shall, at a minimum, contain the following elements:
 - i. Name and contact information of the individual from the local election authority who is designated to ensure to implementation of the plan.
 - ii. Specific COVID-19 safety instructions and training including:
 - i. Cleaning and disinfection protocols.

- ii. Configuration for physical distancing, supplemented by traffic flow guidelines and placement of physical barriers where distancing is not possible.
- iii. Behaviors required of workers: self-monitoring to make sure they do not have symptoms of COVID-19, wearing face coverings, and physical distancing.
- iv. Procedures to ensure compliance with requirements for social distancing, wearing a face-covering, and disinfecting all affected surfaces during the entire polling process.

V. Physical Environment for Polling Locations

- a. Local election authorities are encouraged to relocate polling places previously stationed in nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and senior living residences, to minimize COVID-19 exposure among vulnerable individuals, including older individuals and those with chronic medical conditions.
- b. Place signage at entrances that encourages voters to wear face coverings.
- c. Station election officials at least 6 feet apart.
- d. Station polling booths at least 6 feet apart.
- e. Place visual cues to ensure social distancing of 6 feet, including:
 - i. Separate the entrance and exit, if feasible and appropriate for the space.
 - ii. Require foot traffic be one-directional.
 - iii. Guide voters and observers with visual cues, barriers, props, and signage.
 - iv. Use floor signage to designate “wait here” for the queue inside and for those waiting outside to enter.
 - v. Place visual cues for polling workers to maintain physical distance.
- f. Designate a specific area for polling location workers to take breaks that allows physical distance when workers are eating or drinking and must remove their face coverings.
- g. Consider having outdoor enclosures (i.e., tents, awnings, or canopies) for those waiting outside in case of inclement weather.
- h. Consider stationing election officials in parking areas to encourage voters to wait in their vehicles if the line is long and then direct voters into the queue as space becomes available.
- i. For locations without significant pedestrian voters, consider curbside voting.
 - i. Outdoor enclosures would be required for election officials and stations.
 - ii. Stations for curbside voting would include an area for identification verification and the voting station.
 - iii. If using curbside voting, contingency plans for inclement weather must be in place.
- j. To the extent consistent with applicable law, ensure any signage and messages are accessible to voters with disabilities, for example by providing large print or braille versions or having audible messages with the same information.
- k. Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety

or health risk to poll workers, voters, or children accompanying voters (e.g., risk of falling or triggering asthma symptoms).

VI. Shared objects

- a. Where possible, replace shared objects, like pens, ballot activation cards, or ballot covers with single-use objects.
- b. Shared objects, like pens or ballot activation cards, should be disinfected between users.
 - i. Consider laminated ballot covers that can be disinfected between use.
- c. Headphones for voters with disabilities should be single-use or disinfected between users.
- d. Have “I Voted” stickers separated and available for pick up or consider not offering these stickers.

VII. Preventative Actions in Election Polling Location

- a. Provide a supply of face coverings for voters that arrive at the polling location without a face covering. Face coverings should be offered to the voters outside the polling location to minimize transmission to those waiting in lines.
- b. Election authorities are prohibited from preventing a noncompliant voter from casting a ballot for refusal to wear a face covering outside or inside a polling place.
- c. Voters outside or inside a polling place shall not be screened for COVID-19.
- d. Election officials should take every reasonable action to separate noncompliant voters from those wearing face coverings. These actions may include, but are not limited to, establishing a separate waiting area for non-compliant voters or establishing a separate line or queue. Election officials must provide a means to track the noncompliant voter’s place in the normal queue of voters and call the noncompliant voter from the waiting area when it is their turn to vote.
- e. Consider placing Plexiglas barriers between election officials and voters.
- f. Consider using large print instructions on laminated cards to allow voters to maintain distance and to facilitate communication through masks.
- g. Designate specific polling place personnel to monitor and to remind voters to maintain physical distancing.
- h. Practice routine cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched objects and surfaces in election polling locations (e.g., tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.). See the list of products pre-approved by the EPA for disinfecting available here: <https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf>. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions on the label for cleaning and disinfection products.
- i. Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched electronics (e.g., voting machines, laptops, tablets, keyboards) using products pre-approved by the EPA. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products. For questions about products appropriate for disinfecting voting machines and touch screens, consult with the voting machine manufacturer and consider additional use of wipeable covers for machines, if possible. If no guidance is available from the manufacturer, consider the use of alcohol-based wipes or spray containing at least 70% alcohol to clean voting machine buttons and touch screens. Use of alcohol-based products may reduce risk of damage to sensitive voting machine components.

- j. Ensure bathrooms at the election polling location are adequately supplied with soap, water, and drying materials for handwashing.
- k. Provide voters with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for use before or after the use of a voting machine and after the voting process.
- l. Use signage at the election polling locations encouraging voters to practice proper hygiene (see CDC Printed Resources under Resources).

VIII. Preventative Actions for Polling Location Workers

- a. Wear a face covering at all times in the polling location.
- b. Require election polling location personnel to self-screen for possible COVID-19 symptoms prior to performing their official election duties during early voting and on Election Day.

The screening should include the following symptom questions.

- i. Health screening questions.
 - i. Do you have a fever, chills, runny nose, cough, shortness of breath, headache, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, new loss of taste or smell, or sore throat?
 - 1. Any polling personnel reporting a temperature of greater than 100.4°F (38°C) or symptoms of COVID-19 should be instructed to go home and be evaluated by a medical provider for possible COVID-19. They should not return to the polling location until symptoms have resolved, it has been a minimum of 10 days from onset of symptoms, and at least 1 day from the last fever without fever reducing medications.
 - ii. Within the last 14 days, have you had close contact (within 6 feet for greater than 15 minutes) with someone who has COVID-19?
 - 1. Any polling personnel who reports close contact with someone who has COVID-19 should not return to the polling location until 14 days from the last exposure.
- c. Practice hand hygiene frequently throughout the day. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- d. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Coughing or sneezing must be contained by an appropriate face covering.
- e. Stagger breaks so polling location workers are physically distanced when eating or drinking.

IX. Resources

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/election-polling-locations.html>