



NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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Numbered Memo 2020-17

TO: County Boards of Elections
FROM: Karen Brinson Bell, Executive Director
RE: Office Operations During Pandemic
DATE: August 14, 2020

As the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to affect North Carolina, our nation, and the world, we must continue our response to this pandemic in the conduct of elections and daily operations for the State Board of Elections and county boards of elections offices. This memo supplements previously issued numbered memos. Additional guidance will be provided as information is available and the situation unfolds.

County Boards of Elections Operations

Office Exposure to COVID-19

If you learn that your office has been exposed to COVID-19, you should take immediate steps to address the situation. **Consult with your county administration and health officials for procedures specific to your county.** Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services have published numerous resources available on their respective websites.

Per the CDC, “a potential exposure means being a household contact or having close contact within 6 feet of an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. The timeframe for having contact with an individual includes the period of time of 48 hours before the individual became symptomatic.” When an exposure is determined, county boards of elections should:

- Send the employee(s) home if they become sick during the workday. If they become sick outside of the workday, the employee(s) should not come into the office.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces.
- Identify those who had contact with the ill employee(s) during the time the employee had symptoms and 2 days prior to symptoms. Others in the workplace with close contact within 6 feet of the employee(s) during this time are also considered exposed.

- If the exposure affects the entire office, coordinate with county administration and county board members to close the office immediately. A board meeting is not required in these circumstances, but all board members should be made aware of the actions being taken.
- Set up a locked drop box outside of the office for the public to leave absentee-by-mail requests, voter registration documents, or other materials while the office is closed. See [Numbered Memo 2020-11](#) and [Numbered Memo 2020-15](#) for more information.
- Arrange for mail to be checked, stamped, and secured until the office reopens.
- Post a notice on the office door indicated the office has closed and a phone number and/or email address an individual may use to have their questions or concerns address during the closure.
- Notify the State Board of Elections via a help desk ticket of your closure and the contact information provided in the notice posted on the office door. Also, please email Pat Gannon, your SST, the SBE legal team, and me as Executive Director.
- Resume office operations as quickly as possible when it is safe and following a thorough cleaning of the workplace.

Proactive Measures to Mitigate COVID-19 Exposure

In addition to the health and safety measures in place such as social distancing, wearing masks, washing of hands, and cleaning/disinfecting surfaces routinely, county boards should proactively consider how to have continuity of operations during the pandemic. While circumstances may arise that force the closure of a county board of elections during the pandemic, these strategies should be employed to reduce the necessity to close:

- Create separated work areas to ensure that staff is not working directly in the same work-space. Limit the number of individuals congregating in common spaces at the same time and require masks in common areas and when moving about the office.
- Have staff work in teams or shifts. For example, divide the staff into two teams (Team A and Team B). Have Team A work one week and then telework the next while Team B works in the office and vice versa. This strategy ensures that if one team is exposed to COVID-19 that the other team can assume office operations while the exposed team is isolated, quarantined, or treated. Additionally, have more extensive cleaning performed between the switch between teams if possible.
- Another approach may be to have one or more employees continually telework, so they are not exposed if the office is compromised. If the office is exposed, the employee would assume onsite operations at the office once it has been cleaned and until the other staff is able to return to on-site work.
- It is imperative that cross training take place for all roles and tasks. For example, if your absentee-by-mail specialist contracts COVID-19, make sure you have a plan to ensure the processing of absentee-by-mail requests. Additionally, it is important to document all the steps necessary to complete tasks and make sure they are accessible to other staff members.

Board Member Access and Work in a County Board of Elections Office

While county board members may want to be helpful during these unprecedented times, please recognize that the duties of a board member have not changed. Board members should refrain from any action that may cause them to have to recuse themselves from board processes or that would raise any question of inappropriate action. Additionally, the authority of board members exists only when they are in an open meeting, a quorum is present, and the board is conducting official business, not when a board member is acting individually. For this reason, at no time (whether during a pandemic or otherwise) should a board member have a log in or other access to the SEIMS system. Any data or reports needed by a board member should be prepared by staff members. Additionally, a board member should not possess a key or other entry access to the office. It is permissible for board members to assist with administrative support tasks such as filling supply boxes, assisting with mailings such as sealing or applying postage, or disposal of records in accordance with record retention policies.

Public Meetings

As a reminder, if a county board of elections opts to conduct meetings telephonically, the public must be able to listen to the meeting, which may be accomplished by providing a call-in number. Closed sessions should not be conducted on the same telephonic meeting line as the public line. Boards should convene the closed session on a separate line and then return to the open meeting on the line provided to the public.

If a county board opts to conduct meetings in person (with all board members present or some present and other telephonic), the public must be given access by 1) a call-in number; 2) in-person area in the meeting room with social distancing and other precautions in place; and/or 3) a combination of both methods of access. **It is recommended that a call-in number be provided for all meetings, whether in person or telephonic, to ensure that the public has adequate access.**

No matter the method of meeting, proper notice must be given for the meeting.

More Information on COVID-19

For more information on the State's response and helpful materials about the novel coronavirus, please visit the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' dedicated webpage: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/>.