Numbered Memo 2021-08

TO: County Boards of Elections  
FROM: Karen Brinson Bell, Executive Director  
RE: DHHS Interim Guidance for Election Voting Locations and COVID FAQs  
DATE: September 20, 2021

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has issued the enclosed Interim Guidance for Election Voting Locations. County boards of elections shall follow the guidance, which is incorporated into this numbered memo and replaces the previous guidance from DHHS in Numbered Memo 2020-18.

Also included in this numbered memo are answers to frequently asked questions regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and precautions for the 2021 municipal elections. Because there is not a statewide stay at home order or universal mask mandate in place at this time, rules and regulations may differ depending on county policies, municipal ordinances, and restrictions imposed by private businesses.

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions Regarding COVID-19 and the 2021 Municipal Elections

1. My county requires proof of vaccination or weekly COVID testing for all employees (including seasonal and temporary workers), volunteers, and contract workers. Precinct judges in our county are considered contract workers. Can they be required to provide proof of vaccination or submit to weekly testing?

   No, precinct judges and other election day officials (such as precinct assistants) who are appointed by the county board of elections cannot be required to be vaccinated or submit to weekly COVID testing, even if they are considered contract or temporary employees by the county for HR and/or tax purposes. State law prescribes the requirements for appointment as precinct chief judges and judges (G.S. 163-41), precinct assistants (G.S. 163-42) student election assistants (G.S. 163-42.1), and ballot counters (G.S. 163-43), and a local ordinance or resolution cannot add additional qualifications to those statutory requirements. However, because one-stop
workers are considered employees of the county board of elections by statute (G.S. 163-227.6(a)), any vaccination or COVID testing requirements that apply to county employees do apply to one-stop workers and other employees of the county board of elections who are not appointed as election day precinct officials. If you have questions about a county or municipal policy, resolution, or ordinance, please contact the county or town attorney.

2. Can voters be required to wear masks as a condition of entry into the voting place?
No, a voter cannot be turned away for refusing to wear a mask while voting. Voters should be encouraged to wear a mask and all voting locations should offer free masks for voters, but they cannot be turned away if they do not wear one. Voters who state that a medical exception applies may vote curbside if they wish, but they are not required to do so. If a voter refuses to wear a mask and does not indicate that an exception to wearing a mask applies, they are not eligible to vote curbside if they do not meet one of the other criteria to vote curbside. See Numbered Memo 2020-20.

3. Can voters be required to submit to a temperature or symptom check before entering the voting place?
Because voters cannot be turned away from voting or denied entry to the voting place if they have a fever or other symptoms of illness, voters shall not be asked to submit to a temperature check before entering the voting place. If a voting site generally requires all non-voters to wear masks and submit to temperature screenings prior to entering the building, or if a municipality enacts the same requirements for all municipal-owned buildings, the voting place within the affected building may be sectioned off so that voters, who do not go through the checks, are not able to enter other areas of the building.

4. Can pollworkers and observers be required to wear masks in the voting place?
Pollworkers and observers can be required to wear masks in the voting place if the building requires it. For example, if the polling site is located within a school and that school district requires masks to be worn by students, staff, and visitors, then pollworkers and observers must wear masks inside that building. If a town government requires masks to be worn inside all municipal buildings, and the polling location is in a public library owned by the town, then pollworkers and observers are required to wear masks inside that building as well. **However, voters cannot be required to wear a mask to enter the building.**
5. Can voters who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 vote curbside?
Yes, Numbered Memo 2020-20 remains in effect. The term “disability” includes voters who have a medical condition that puts them increased risk of contracting COVID-19, should not wear a mask due to a medical or behavioral condition or disability, or are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.

6. May hand sanitizer or other supplies provided to the county boards of elections be used for this or future elections?
Yes, State Emergency Management has indicated that hand sanitizer and supplies previously deployed may be used for any event you choose. If the hand sanitizer product has surpassed its expiration date, it can still be used but it may have a lower efficacy after the “best by” date.
Interim Guidance for Election Voting Locations
(2021 Municipal Elections)

This guidance provides steps that should be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in election voting locations.

Guidelines for Voting Locations: Any scenario in which many people gather poses a risk for COVID-19 transmission. Election officials should create and implement a plan to minimize the opportunity for COVID-19 transmission at all voting locations, where groups of people gather in an enclosed space. The guidance below will help election voting locations reduce the spread of COVID-19 in their communities.

Spreading out the time and locations that individuals can vote is critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19. Strategies like these can help reduce voters’ risk of exposure and keep our communities safer.

This guidance covers the following topics:
- Vaccination
- Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure
- Masking
- Ventilation
- Cleaning and Hygiene
- Monitoring for Symptoms
- Communications and Combatting Misinformation
- Additional Resources

Vaccination
Vaccination is the most efficient control measure available to protect against COVID-19, particularly to prevent severe illness and death. It is therefore strongly encouraged that persons not yet vaccinated get vaccinated. Even if individuals have been ill with COVID-19 previously, getting a vaccine significantly reduces the risk of reinfection.

For more information go to Find Your Spot, Take Your Shot. For guidance on vaccinations, please refer to the DHHS Interim Guidance for Individuals Who Have Been Vaccinated Against COVID-19 and Recommendations for Protecting Each Other.
Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure

Social distancing is an efficient tool to decrease the spread of COVID-19. Social distancing (“physical distancing”) means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. If you are not fully vaccinated, stay at least six feet (about two arms’ length) from other people; do not gather in groups; stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings.

It is recommended that election officials at all voting locations:
- Remind election workers and voters upon arrival to leave space between themselves and others.
- Encourage election workers and voters to stay at least 6 feet apart. Clearly provide 6 feet floor markings in lines, at voting booths, and other waiting areas.
- Limit capacity in all elevators, lobbies, restrooms, and other enclosed places to promote social distancing.

Masking

Wearing a mask can help reduce the spread of COVID-19, especially because people may be infected with the virus and not know it.

It is strongly recommended that election officials at all voting locations:
- Encourage voters, observers, and electioneers to wear a mask when they are indoors as well as maintain physical distancing, unless they state an exception applies.

It is recommended that all voting locations:
- Post signage encouraging all election officials and voters to wear a mask if they are in a county of high or substantial levels of transmission as defined by the CDC. English: Option 1 | Option 2, Spanish: Option 1 | Option 2
- Provide disposable masks for voters to use while at the voting site.
- Visit the NC DHHS Face Coverings and Masks page for more information about current mask guidance.

Ventilation

SARS-CoV-2 viral particles spread between people more readily indoors; therefore, improvements to building ventilation are part of a layered approach to reduce exposure to the virus.

To help reduce the concentration of viral particles in the air, it is recommended that voting locations:
- If possible, use fans to provide for increased air circulation. Placement of fans can be important and are outlined in the CDC’s indoor use of fans. Care should be taken to position fans in clean to less clean areas. Ceiling fans may be set on low setting and reversed direction, so room air is pulled towards the ceiling.
- Turn off any controls for demand-controlled ventilation that reduce air supply based on occupancy or temperature during occupied hours. This means switching the thermostat from “auto” to “on” position, which will operate the fan continuously.
- Increase air filtration to as high as possible without significantly reducing design airflow and make sure air filters are properly sized and maintained.
Ensure restroom exhaust fans are operational and running while the building is occupied.
Use portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan/filtration systems to enhance air cleaning.

**Cleaning and Hygiene**
Washing hands with soap for 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer reduces the spread of transmission.

**It is recommended that election officials at all voting locations:**
- Clean surfaces once a day, prioritizing high-touch surfaces. If there has been a sick person or someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours, clean and disinfect the space using an EPA-approved disinfectant for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19).
- **Wash their hands** frequently (e.g., before entering the polling location, before and after breaks or shifts, after touching or handling masks or PPE, after using the restroom, after touching shared surfaces or objects) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer at least 60% alcohol at entrances and other areas in the voting place as needed.
- Systematically and frequently check and refill hand sanitizers throughout the day and ensure soap and paper towels or hand drying devices are available.

**Monitoring for Symptoms**
Election officials should be encouraged to self-monitor for symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, or new loss of smell or taste. If they develop symptoms, they should notify the county board of elections and stay home, or return home if they were at the election site. More information on [how to monitor for symptoms](https://www.cdc.gov) is available from the CDC.

**It is recommended that election officials:**
- Have a plan in place for immediately removing election workers if symptoms develop while at the voting location. Employees who have symptoms when they arrive at the voting site or become sick during their shift should immediately be separated from other workers and the public and be sent home or to their healthcare provider.
- Post signage at the main entrance, such as [Know Your Ws/Stop if You Have Symptoms](https://www.cdc.gov) flyers (English - Color, Black & White; Spanish - Color, Black & White), requesting that people who are or have recently been symptomatic with fever and/or cough not enter and instead vote curbside.
- Educate election workers about when they should stay home and when they can return to work.
- Ensure that voting locations are adequately staffed to cover any sick election workers who need to stay home.
- Have any symptomatic election workers wear a mask until they are able to leave the facility.
- **Per CDC guidelines**, if an individual has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is presumed positive by a medical professional due to symptoms, the individual should **isolate** until:
  - No fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) AND
  - Other symptoms have improved (e.g., coughing, shortness of breath) AND
  - At least 10 days have passed since first symptoms
Per CDC guidelines, if an individual has been diagnosed with COVID-19 but does not have symptoms, they should isolate until 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test, assuming they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test. Anyone who develops symptoms should follow the criteria for when symptomatic individuals can end isolation described above.

Offer alternative voting options for voters with symptoms, those who are sick or known COVID-19 positive. Alternative voting options should minimize exposure between election workers and voters, such as curbside voting for sick voters. Election workers assisting voters with symptoms should be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE), including respiratory protection, face shields, gowns, and gloves, and trained in the appropriate use of this equipment.

Ensure voting options are accessible to voters with disabilities.

Communication and Combatting Misinformation

Help ensure that the information election workers and voters are getting is coming directly from reliable resources. Use resources from a trusted source like the CDC or NCDHHS to promote behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19.

It is recommended that county boards of elections:

- Provide election workers with signs, posters, and flyers at main entrances and in key areas throughout the voting location such as those found on the Social Media Toolkit for COVID-19 to encourage election workers and voters to wear masks, wash hands, and stay six feet apart whenever possible (Wear, Wait, Wash).
  - Know Your W’s signs are available in English and Spanish.
- Include messages about behaviors that prevent the spread of COVID-19 when communicating with voters (such as on websites, in videos, in emails, and on social media accounts).
- Notify voters of changes to voting operations, including the availability of alternative voting options that minimize contact, as allowed.

Additional Resources

- NCDHHS: North Carolina COVID-19
- EPA: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2
- HHS/OSHA: Protecting Workers: Guidance on Mitigating and Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace
- DHS: Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce

Staying apart brings us together. Protect your family and neighbors.

#StayStrongNC

Learn more at nc.gov/covid19.
Voting Safely During COVID-19

As NC residents prepare to vote this election season, both polling locations and voters have a role to play in reducing exposure to COVID-19. Election officials have been asked to create and implement plans to minimize viral spread at polling locations, including encouraging mask wearing, social distancing requirements, and sanitation protocols. Voters also have the responsibility to protect themselves and others during the voting process.

Voting Guidelines

For all North Carolina voters, be prepared to vote during the 2021 municipal elections by:

- Confirming your voter registration status.
- Verifying your voting location and location’s requirements in advance as they may have been affected by COVID-19, including information regarding voters with disabilities.
- Reviewing your sample ballot in advance of voting to reduce time at your polling place. Sample ballots are available through the State Board of Elections’ Voter Search tool.

In-Person Voting Guidelines

Not all municipalities permit absentee by mail or in-person early voting. Confirm in advance if you will need to vote at your Election Day polling place. If you plan to vote in-person, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) recommend the following protective measures:

- All North Carolinians are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated. Information can be found at Find Your Spot, Take Your Shot. For guidance on vaccinations, please refer to our Interim Guidance for Individuals Who Have Been Vaccinated Against COVID-19 and Recommendations for Protecting Each Other.
- Wear a face mask when you go to vote and keep it on throughout the voting process. Free masks will be available at all early voting sites and Election Day precincts for voters who do not bring one.
- While at your polling location, stay 6-feet apart from others, including other voters if you have to wait in line.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after voting at your polling location. Hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol will be available at every voting place.
- Consider voting at off-peak times, such as mid-morning, to avoid crowds.
- Stay home if you do not feel well. Voters are encouraged to isolate away from people if they are experiencing flu-like symptoms. If you or a household member is experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms, contact your health care provider about getting tested. If you do visit a voting site when you are experiencing symptoms, vote curbside rather than entering the voting place.

Additional Resources

- NCDHHS: North Carolina COVID-19
- State Board of Elections