

ASSISTING SICK, EXPOSED, SYMPTOMATIC, AND QUARANTINED VOTERS



This document is one in a series created as part of the Election Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council and Subsector Coordinating Council's Joint COVID Working Group. These documents provide guidance for state, local, tribal, and territorial election officials on how to administer and secure election infrastructure in light of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Election officials across the country are implementing practices to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 during the November elections. Mitigation measures for in-person voting, such as wearing a face covering, social distancing, hand hygiene, cleaning and disinfection, and other measures, lessen the risk of spreading COVID-19 among voters, poll workers, and other individuals at voting locations. These measures mitigate the spread of COVID-19 from knowingly and unknowingly infected individuals alike.

As part of pre-election planning, election officials should assume that they will encounter eligible voters who are knowingly infected, exposed, and/or symptomatic and who prefer to vote in person. Some voters may learn of their COVID-19 infection status, exposure, experience symptoms, and/or be under quarantine without enough time to request a mail-in or absentee ballot and may need additional assistance to vote in the November election. Others may need to use the accessibility features afforded by in-person voting.

This document seeks to briefly summarize existing guidance on assisting knowingly infected, exposed, symptomatic, and/or quarantined voters and share relevant practices used by election officials during 2020 primary elections. The document complements previous [voluntary guidance on in-person voting](#) offered by the Election Infrastructure Subsector's Government Coordinating Council (GCC) and Sector Coordinating Council (SCC) Joint COVID-19 Working Group. As election laws vary by state, election officials should seek legal guidance before implementing the practices described in this guidance.

- **Consult guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and relevant state or local health officials** – The CDC website contains [interim guidance for polling locations and voters](#), updated most recently in June. The CDC interim guidance includes a section dedicated to supporting voters with symptoms, and those who are sick or known COVID-19 positive. State health departments can also be a valuable resource. The Association

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of State and Territorial Health Officials maintains a [list](#) of state and territorial health officials and their contact information. At the local level, the National Association of City and County Health Officials maintains a national [directory](#) of COVID-19 contact information for local health departments. Additionally, the [American Public Health Association](#) maintains a list of state and regional public health associations who may also provide guidance or assistance.

- **Monitor COVID-19 case information** – While all election officials should be prepared for encountering sick, exposed, and/or symptomatic voters at the polls, monitoring COVID-19 case information and trend data by jurisdiction will help election officials prepare for the potential scale of impacted voters. The CDC website publishes [state-level data on new cases](#) and many state health department websites publish such data at the local jurisdiction level.
- **Establish a plan for assisting knowingly infected, exposed, symptomatic, and/or quarantined voters, and train relevant election office staff and poll workers on the plan** – All staff who answer questions from voters, including at pre-election and Election Day call centers, and election workers should be equipped to answer questions and ensure all voters can vote safely.
- **Proactively message how knowingly infected, exposed, symptomatic, and/or quarantined voters can participate via multiple communication channels** – Proactively providing voter information on the election office website and through other official channels allows voters to plan how to vote safely. As some knowingly infected, exposed and/or symptomatic voters may turn out on Election Day, make sure to have clear signage for posting outside voting locations with information on all available voting options.

- **Encourage knowingly infected, exposed, symptomatic, and/or quarantined voters to cast a mail-in or absentee ballot, provided they meet the state's eligibility requirements –**
 - Mail-in or absentee voting allows eligible voters to participate in the election while staying home. In general, the CDC [recommends](#) those who are infected with COVID-19 or think they may be infected to stay home except when seeking medical care.
 - Be mindful of U.S. Postal Service (USPS) delivery standards – it may not be advisable for voters to return their ballot by mail if they are too close to the election, so these voters should be advised to return their ballots to a drop box, election office, or other approved location. CDC [guidance](#) notes that mail-in or absentee ballots delivered by hand (i.e., not via USPS) can be held for three hours prior to processing to further reduce risk of COVID-19 spread.
- **Familiarize staff with emergency ballot options** - Most states offer [emergency balloting options](#) for voters who are suddenly unable to vote in person after mail-in or absentee ballot request deadlines have passed. Because the emergency ballot option is used less frequently, all staff, especially those answering phones, should be familiar with the available options. Local election officials may also want to prepare for an increase in use of emergency ballots and any accompanying processes those require.
- **Consider implementing alternative voting options for infected, exposed, symptomatic, and/or quarantined voters, such as designated voting sites and/or curbside or drive-through voting, where permitted. Consult the state's legal framework, including emergency orders, to learn what may be permissible. –**
 - Special voting sites designated for infected, exposed, and/or symptomatic voters allow election officials to take additional, dedicated precautions for mitigating the risk of COVID-19 spread at those sites, including specialized training for poll workers and heightened requirements for use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - Curbside or drive-through voting limits infected, exposed, and/or symptomatic voters' interaction with others, keeps them out of in-person voting sites, and can be

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- supported by specially trained and equipped poll workers. Complementing CDC guidance on in-person voting, [voluntary guidance](#) from the Election Infrastructure Subsector's GCC-SCC Joint COVID-19 Working Group includes information on promoting [health and safety at the polling place](#), as well as considerations for [drive-through voting](#) and [alternative voting sites](#). Some non-governmental resources offer additional detailed suggestions for safely administering curbside or drive-through voting.¹
- Ensure poll workers and election staff supporting in-person voting by infected, exposed, and/or symptomatic voters are equipped with recommended PPE and are trained in its appropriate use. The type of PPE used by poll workers and election staff supporting infected, exposed, and/or symptomatic voters should provide greater protection than the equipment used by poll workers supporting the general voting populace. CDC [guidance](#) states that poll workers assisting voters with symptoms should use PPE, including respiratory protection, face shields, gowns, and gloves, and be trained in the appropriate use of this equipment. The CDC website provides [videos and guidance](#) on how to properly put on and take off PPE.

¹ See, e.g.: Stanford-MIT Healthy Elections Project, *Healthy Polling Place Guidebook*, <https://healthypolls.stanford.edu/resources/healthy-polling-places-guidebook>; and Elections Group, *Running a Safe Election in a Pandemic—Start to Finish*, [https://electionsgroup.com/assets/Running Elections Safely in a Pandemic.pdf](https://electionsgroup.com/assets/Running_Elections_Safely_in_a_Pandemic.pdf).