

Guidelines for Healthy In-Person Voting

The Brennan Center and the Infectious Diseases Society of America have issued joint guidelines to minimize the risk of transmitting Covid-19 at the polls this November.

By the **Brennan Center for Justice** and the **Infectious Diseases Society of America** PUBLISHED AUGUST 12, 2020

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic is not going away before Election Day. While voting by mail is the safest option to avoid Covid-19 transmission, some individuals will be unable or unwilling to vote in this manner. Clear, evidence-based information about how to safely conduct in-person voting at polling places in November is more critical than ever. Accordingly, the Brennan Center has partnered with the [Infectious Diseases Society of America](#) (IDSA) to release *Guidelines for Healthy In-Person Voting*.

The document provides common-sense information on a range of topics, including voting location siting and configuration, supplies to prevent Covid-19 transmission, and poll worker precautions to protect voters and workers alike. Our guidelines draw from the independent, interdisciplinary knowledge of the more than 12,000 infectious diseases physicians, public health officials, epidemiologists, and researchers that make IDSA one of the nation's preeminent medical organizations, as well as from the Brennan Center's expertise in election adminis-

tration. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also [issued recommendations](#) for election polling locations, which we suggest reviewing.

No voter should have to choose between their safety and their fundamental right to vote in November. And with the right policies, planning, and practices in place, they will not have to.

General Guidance

- In-person voting can be conducted safely if jurisdictions take the necessary steps to minimize the risk of transmission of Covid-19 to voters and election workers. To the extent permissible under public health mandates, jurisdictions that offer polling place voting must continue to do so.
- Jurisdictions should meet regularly with health experts and their local health departments to ensure health practices are responsive to the current state of the

Covid-19 pandemic in their jurisdiction.

- In addition, election officials should review the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for preventing transmission of Covid-19 at in-person voting locations.

Polling Place Siting

- Preparations should be made now to modify polling place siting decisions to account for Covid-19. Wherever possible, jurisdictions should avoid decreasing the overall number of voting locations and should consider expanding the number of voting locations for November, in order to avoid overcrowding at voting sites.
- Polling places sited in buildings that primarily serve communities identified as high risk for serious Covid-19 illness, such as senior care facilities, must be relocated.
- Wherever possible, voting locations should be relocated to spaces that are well-ventilated and can accommodate social distancing measures, including adequate space between voting privacy booths. Some examples of these spaces include
 - » school gymnasiums;
 - » community recreation centers;
 - » convention centers; and
 - » large parking lots (where weather permits).
- Wherever possible, voting locations should have separate points of entry and exit to optimize infection control practices and to minimize crowds forming in the space.
- In the event of a location change
 - » voters should immediately be given individualized notice of the change, with a second notice to be given within weeks of the November election; and
 - » if polling places are moved out of senior care facilities or other residential sites, plans should be implemented to ensure that the residents of those facilities are able to cast a ballot.
- In determining modifications to polling location plans, election administration officials must assess the impact of voting changes on vulnerable communities and

ensure that polling place location changes increase, not limit, accessibility for racial and language minority voters, students, voters with disabilities, and individuals displaced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Healthy Polling Places

- Voters should take proactive steps to keep voting locations safe and healthy, including
 - » wearing a mask to the voting location, but polling places should provide free masks to all voters in the event a voter does not arrive with a mask and should strongly encourage voters to wear a mask while casting a ballot;
 - » maintaining social distancing of at least six feet from other voters and poll workers; and
 - » avoiding bringing any unnecessary persons, such as children or other non-voting eligible family members, to the voting location.
- To comply with social distancing policies, polling places will require reconfiguration to allow substantial space between voting privacy booths, distance between poll workers, etc. This means
 - » where possible, polling place check-in stations should be set up in a designated area separated from the voting space, with a plexiglass barrier between the voter and the poll worker;
 - » workers should use tape or other semi-permanent markers to mark six-foot distances in lines and at polling place tables; and
 - » tape should also be used to hang signs in polling places and to mark designated areas at the pollbook table where voters will be required to show identification.
- To facilitate increased air flow and avoid recirculation of contaminated air, HVAC capacity of voting locations should be maximized and, where possible, air filtration systems should be used.
- Polling places will need to be sanitized to prevent transmission of the virus. This means poll workers should
 - » regularly clean frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, voting booths, and bathrooms (approximately every four hours);

- » use alcohol-based hand sanitizer or wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, per CDC guidelines;
- » clean and disinfect voting machines and other equipment;
- » sanitize voting booth surface after each use;
- » have hand sanitizer available before people enter the voting area (and can even offer to spray voters' hands); and
- » have disinfectant wipes to clean down voting area.
- Polling places should be equipped with necessary sanitation products, including:
 - » alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
 - » hand sanitizing stations, available upon entry and exit;
 - » mobile handwashing stations with soap, water, and disposable drying materials; and
 - » disinfection wipes.
- Procedures should be established to ensure that hand sanitizer use does not jam ballot scanners.
- Ballot-marking procedures should be established to minimize viral transmission. For instance
 - » voters should be provided with disposable pens or pencils to mark paper ballots; or
 - » Q-tips, finger covers, or other disposable devices should be used to mark votes, instead of voters using their fingers.
- Curbside voting options should be made available, especially for voters with disabilities or illnesses who may not be able to leave their vehicles.
 - » Voters who arrive at the polling place and are feeling unwell or exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms should be encouraged to use curbside voting to minimize exposure inside the voting location.
 - » Voters using curbside options should have assistance provided to them in a manner that preserves independence, autonomy, and ballot secrecy.

Healthy Poll Workers

- Jurisdictions should increase efforts to recruit poll workers and recruit a surplus of poll workers for elections, especially from segments of the population who are not at high risk from Covid-19.
- Administrators should consult with a stakeholder working group, and particularly community representatives, to recruit both monolingual and bilingual poll workers.
- Jurisdictions should recruit more monolingual and bilingual poll workers than needed for Election Day to account for potential absences due to sickness or fear of Covid-19.
- All voting and public health materials should be offered in multiple languages.
- All poll workers should be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE), including surgical face masks and gloves.
- Additional PPE should be provided to poll workers who are serving as the curbside voting assistant. These workers should be provided with
 - » face shields;
 - » surgical face masks; and
 - » gloves.
- Jurisdictions should work with public health departments to develop a system for poll workers to check for any symptoms before their shifts, and to ensure that the public is being monitored for spread. This might include
 - » personal health surveys to ensure workers are not exhibiting symptoms of Covid-19;
 - » free Covid-19 testing for poll workers prior to their shifts and/or following their shifts; and
 - » expanded testing opportunities for voters who voted in person.
- Resource plans should also account for online or webinar-based trainings of poll workers.
- Jurisdictions should work with local public health departments to provide a comprehensive poll worker

safety manual and training program. Poll workers should receive training on relevant topics, such as

- » proper procedures for removing used gloves and masks;
- » proper procedures for hand washing;
- » proper procedures for sanitizing various frequently-used surfaces in the polling place; and
- » proper procedures for interacting with voters or poll workers who appear symptomatic or feel unwell.