



IN COLLABORATION WITH



OHIO SECRETARY OF STATE HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR BOARDS OF ELECTIONS

*Protecting Voters and Precinct Election Officials and Ensuring All Ohioans Can Safely Cast Their
Vote for the November 3, 2020 General Election*

Ohio's 88 county boards of elections are in a strong position to administer all three methods of voting that are available to eligible voters in our state, including early in-person voting and no fault absentee voting by mail from October 6, 2020, through November 2, 2020, and in-person Election Day voting from 6:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m. on November 3, 2020. Consistent with guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") to voting administrators across the United States, Ohio offers a wide variety of voting options, including more days and more hours for voting than most states and significantly more than the national average, and gives voters options for reducing the number of voters within a polling location at the same time, including drop boxes at each county board of elections and curbside voting. According to the CDC, this makes for "lower risk election polling settings." (Specific guidance regarding best practices for safe and efficient curbside voting is forthcoming.)

While many state legislatures and policy makers are grappling with those decisions, Ohio finds itself in the fortunate position of needing only small changes to improve the already safe, secure, and accessible elections system that we have in place. Ohio has long offered three different ways to vote: by mail; early in-person during the four weeks preceding Election Day, including evenings and weekends; and in-person on Election Day. Additionally, boards of elections provide curbside voting and have a secure drop box at every board of elections for voters who do not want to enter the board office or a polling location. Further, the Secretary of State's Office required boards of elections to move polling locations out of facilities that serve vulnerable populations. Therefore, Ohio already meets the CDC's lower risk election polling location recommendations.

Beyond that, Secretary LaRose is committed to ensuring that all election officials and voters are as safe as possible when they are administering and participating Ohio's elections. In consultation with the Ohio Department of Health ("ODH") and based on the CDC guidance, the Secretary of State's Office provides the following recommendations to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in boards of elections, early vote centers, and polling places building on the requirements set forth in [Directive 2020-11](#).

This guidance will continue to evolve as the health situation continues to develop and thus will likely change based on additional information from health care professionals. The Secretary of State's Office will update it as necessary and inform the boards of elections of such changes.

ABSENTEE VOTING BY MAIL

- Boards of elections must promote absentee voting by mail for all voters, including the use of remote ballot marking systems for voters with a disability.
- Boards of elections must utilize social media, local media, and any other means to encourage voters to request an absentee ballot application. We have all become familiar with the term "flattening the curve" regarding the spread of COVID-19. The same principal applies to the absentee vote by mail process. Voters requesting their ballots earlier and voters returning their ballots earlier will "flatten the curve" of processing those requests and ballots at Ohio's 88 county boards of elections.
- According to the CDC, "although the virus can survive for a short period on some surfaces, it is unlikely to be spread from domestic or international mail, products or packaging." Election officials who handle mail-in ballots should wash their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- To further reduce the risk of transmission, boards can securely store absentee ballot applications and ballots for three hours prior to processing.
- Election officials that handle mail-in ballots must disinfect equipment and other surfaces that are frequently touched when processing absentee ballot applications and ballots.
- Boards of elections must set up stations for the mail-in ballot processing equipment as far apart as possible so staff working on different steps of processing are socially distanced at least six feet apart, if possible. Boards of elections should limit the sharing of supplies and materials between staff members. When that is not possible, boards of elections should ensure that materials are transferred between staff members as little as possible, while still maintaining a bipartisan process. Boards of elections should disinfect any equipment that is shared frequently and in between uses.

ELECTION OFFICIALS AND PRECINCT ELECTION OFFICIALS

- Boards of elections will instruct their staff and precinct election officials to take their temperature prior to working at the board of elections, early vote center, or polling location. Boards should consider procuring a touchless thermometer to take the temperature of those election officials and precinct election officials that have not taken their own temperature.
- Boards of elections must require their staff and precinct election officials to stay home if they do not feel well or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- All election officials must be equipped with and wearing personal protective equipment (“PPE”), including a cloth mask or face shield. All election officials should wear cloth face coverings unless one of the following exceptions applies:
 - The individual has a documented medical condition or disability that prevents the wearing of a face covering; or
 - The individual is communicating with someone who is hearing-impaired or has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- Where social distancing is not possible, boards of elections should consider the use of a clear plastic barrier or face shield, in conjunction with a face covering. These do not require expensive, permanent purchases. Secretary LaRose posted a how-to video which can be viewed [here](#).
- Election officials must maintain at least six feet of distance between each other and voters as much as is practicable. Election officials’ check-in stations should be set up so that those that are working the check-in table are at least six feet apart from each other. If, for instance, two tables can be placed where one typically would be, putting additional space between the precinct election officials and voters, that social distancing and the use of cloth masks reduces the need for plastic barriers.
- Election officials must distance themselves when in the same vehicle, as far apart as possible, when transporting elections equipment, ballots, or other election materials that require bipartisan transportation. Election officials and precinct election officials must wear cloth masks or PPE during transport, particularly when maintaining six feet distance is not possible.
- All election officials must be equipped with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol for use at each step in the voting process where the election officials are interacting with voters. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers should be in a visible, frequently used location such as check-in stations, where “I Voted” stickers are dispensed, and exits. Election officials must work with their vendors to

ensure that hand sanitizer will not interfere or damage election material, such as ballots or equipment. Election officials must ensure their hands are dry prior to handling election material.

- Boards of elections must direct precinct election officials and election officials to wash their hands throughout the day with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Boards of elections must ensure that precinct election officials directly assisting voters are equipped with personal protective equipment including face mask or cloth mask, face shields, gowns, and gloves and are trained to use the personal protective equipment appropriately.
- Boards of elections should ensure that precinct election officials wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer after helping every curbside voter.
- Boards of elections and precinct election officials must encourage any voter who may have been exposed to COVID-19 or exhibit symptoms to utilize an alternate voting method such as absentee voting. However, if a voter with symptoms still wishes to vote on Election Day or early in-person, boards of elections should ask the voter to utilize curbside voting and remain in their vehicle. No matter what, every eligible voter who wishes to vote must be permitted to do so after they are asked to consider safer alternatives.
- Boards of elections should require all precinct election officials to take their temperature prior to working on Election Day and require them to stay home if they do not feel well or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, but also recruit a replacement precinct election officials for them and notify the board of elections as soon as possible.
- Boards of elections must ensure that each polling location, the board of elections, and early vote center have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors such as soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, and no-touch trash cans.
- Boards of elections must prohibit communal eating, such as sharing pizza or from a crockpot. Pre-packaged or single serving food or snack may be permitted.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING ELECTION EQUIPMENT AND OTHER SURFACES AND FACILITIES

- Boards of elections and precinct election officials must follow the guidance of election equipment manufacturers to properly and safely disinfect election equipment, such as epollbooks, touchscreen voting equipment, scanning

equipment, and any election equipment that exposes either them or voters to surfaces touched by others. Boards of elections should work with their vendor to understand the equipment-specific guidance. Vendor specific guidance provided to our office is attached to this document.

- Boards of elections that use touchscreen voting equipment, such as an ePollbook, must consider providing a voter with a single stylus that they use throughout the entire voting transaction. If feasible, the board should consider allowing the voter to keep the stylus. If a one-time use stylus is not feasible, boards must have a procedure for disinfecting any used stylus before it is provided to another voter. For some machines, a disposable Q-tip may work and should be considered.
- As much as possible, boards of elections and precinct election officials must minimize or eliminate the handling of shared objects, such as pens. Any item that is not possible to convert to a single use item must be disinfected between uses. Items that are not single use should be returned to a container marked for such purpose rather than handed directly to another precinct election official. Voters are encouraged to bring their own pen to the board of elections, early vote center or polling location.
- Boards of elections must frequently disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched by election officials and/or voters, such as the check-in station, provisional ballot tables, and door handles using products with [EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims](#).
- Boards of elections must clean all surfaces prior to disinfecting them while setting up early vote centers, polling locations, or a board of election.
- Restrooms should be cleaned and disinfected routinely.

VOTERS

- Boards of elections must utilize signage, which the Secretary of State's Office will provide, as well as other visual cues, or orally communicate to voters upon arrival at the board of elections, early vote center, or polling location that they should leave at least six feet of space between themselves and others, wear a face covering, and otherwise follow recommendations for the protection of themselves and others.
- Boards of elections should use obvious markers such as tape to manage lines and remind voters to maintain social distancing while in line at the board of elections, early vote centers, or polling locations.
- Boards of elections should utilize staff or volunteers to monitor the lines to ensure social distancing and proper protocols are being followed and encouraged.

- Boards of elections must encourage all voters to wear a mask while physically present inside or in line for the board of elections, early vote center, or polling location. However, even with the [ODH Order](#) currently in effect, voters cannot be required to wear a mask in order to vote in person. **All eligible voters must be permitted to vote.**
- If a voter refuses to wear a mask inside the board of elections, early vote center or polling location, election officials and precinct election officials should offer the voter the option of curbside voting. **However, if the voter refuses curbside voting, the voter must still be permitted to vote.**
- Boards of elections should include information in their precinct election official training regarding conflict, de-escalation and seeking assistance from other election officials or precinct election officials if there is a conflict regarding a face mask. For example, precinct election officials and election officials should:
 - Speak with a calm voice;
 - Do not engage in underlying issues that may factor into the objection;
 - Remind the voter that they are permitted to vote, and that they are being asked to wear a mask for the health and safety of other voters and PEO's;
 - If de-escalation fails, inform a voting location manager or supervisor;
 - If a precinct election official or election official feels the safety of any person is in jeopardy, please contact law enforcement.
- Boards of elections should procure additional masks to have at boards of elections, early vote centers, or polling locations for voters who may not have a mask but wish to wear one in the board of elections, early vote center, or polling location. Boards of elections should post signs providing instructions on proper wearing as well as safe removal and handling of masks. Per ODH, cloth masks are appropriate for voters, board staff, and precinct election officials. N95 medical grade masks are not required for work within a polling location or board of elections.
- Cloth face masks can make it more difficult for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing to lip-read, hear, or understand what people are saying. Clear face coverings, face shields, or fixed clear barriers can support lip reading. Consistent with applicable law, election officials should consider having supplies such as clear face coverings available to ensure that voting is accessible to people with disabilities.
- Boards of elections should utilize signage provided by the Secretary of State's Office as well as other visual cues, and orally communicate to voters to **not** disinfect or wipe down the voting equipment themselves, but reassure the voters that voting equipment is disinfected and cleaned routinely.

- Boards of elections and precinct election officials should prepare for voters in vulnerable populations to utilize curbside voting. Additionally, please refer to [Directive 2020-11](#) regarding procedures for assisting voters in senior living and health care facilities.

LAYOUTS FOR BOARD OF ELECTIONS, EARLY VOTE CENTER, OR POLLING LOCATIONS

- Boards of elections must modify the flow of the voting transaction so that voters are moving in one linear direction (i.e. the voter is not retracing their steps or coming into contact with voters who are still in line), whenever practicable.
- If possible, boards of elections should not have doors that serve as both the entry and exit. Boards of elections and precinct election officials should consider propping doors at polling locations open to increase air circulation and work with facility hosts to find other ways to encourage maximum ventilation, if possible, taking into consideration weather and security concerns. Boards should also consider maximizing ventilation in transport vehicles and bathrooms, if possible, in light of weather and security concerns.
- Check-in stations should be set up to permit election officials and voters to maintain six feet distance.
- Board of elections should arrange provisional ballot tables so that voters are at least six feet apart from each other.
- Boards of elections should consider procuring a low-cost clear or transparent barrier at the check-in station to separate the election official from the voter if six feet cannot be maintained in order to complete the check-in process. Secretary LaRose posted a how-to video which can be viewed [here](#).
- For Direct Record Equipment (“DRE”) counties, the DRE machines should be placed six feet (or as far as possible) apart.
- For hybrid counties, the ballot marking devices should be placed six feet (or as far as possible) apart. Election officials should ensure that the scanners are far enough apart from the marking devices to ensure that voter waiting to scan their ballot cards may do so safely and socially distanced at least six feet (or as far as possible) apart from other voters in line to scan and those who are marking their ballots.
- For optical scan counties, only one voter should be permitted to mark their ballot at each station. In some counties, each ballot marking station may normally be used by three to four voters at a time. This is no longer permissible pursuant to

social distancing guidelines. Boards of elections must also use the privacy screens and marking tables to ensure social distancing and maintain the voter's privacy.

- Boards of elections should ensure that garbage cans are conveniently located at exits for voters who wish to discard disposable PPE, such as masks. Boards should also ensure these garbage cans are emptied regularly.

OBSERVERS

- Boards of elections must direct observers to practice social distancing and wear facial coverings.
- An observer who refuses to wear a mask or covering is considered to be obstructing voting, and must be positioned such that they are at least six feet from everyone else at all times.
- For observation of the unofficial and official canvass, boards should consider offering a live stream which can be viewed by the general public. If this option is not chosen, the board should offer remote access to recognized observers via livestream, video conference, or similar technology in lieu of observers being physically present. Boards must also consider observers in their plans for social distancing and sanitizing protocols, should observers insist on attending in person. Observers should have their own personal protective equipment or facial coverings and wear it while present at the office of a board of elections. Boards may provide such equipment to an observer who is unable to secure it.