



## Health and Safety Considerations for Conducting General Local Elections and Assent Voting

### Introduction

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs will continue to monitor advice from the Provincial Health Officer and work with local governments to be responsive should public health circumstances shift. Consistent with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, the [Elections in Special Circumstances \(COVID-19\) Regulation](#) has been repealed (effective March 31, 2022).

This guidance provides health and safety tips that local governments may want to consider when preparing for the 2022 general local elections and assent votes in their communities. Local governments can use the information provided, in conjunction with the *Local Government Act* (LGA) and their election bylaw, to establish clear processes and procedures for these events that incorporate health and safety measures and communicable disease guidance provided by [WorkSafeBC](#).

For more information and sources on communicable disease transmission and practical measures to lower the risk of infection, please see the Additional Resources section below.

### Health and Safety Considerations

Local governments must follow communicable disease guidance provided by [WorkSafeBC](#) and can consider the following questions to assess their procedures and processes and inform their decision-making:

- What changes can be made to the processes and procedures to assist the Chief Elections Officer to administer elections that mitigate risk of communicable disease transmission and help alleviate safety concerns for election staff and the public?
- How to make voting opportunities accessible to electors that are self-isolating, in quarantine, sick, immune compromised or not comfortable attending in person?
- Are election staff or volunteers aware of health and safety precautions for voting places?

The sections below provide some suggestions for health and safety measures that local governments may consider as they prepare voting processes and plan for the 2022 general local elections.

### Electronic Transactions

- Consider whether application of the *Electronic Transactions Act* (ETA) may assist election officials with accepting nomination documents, official agent or financial agent appointment, elector registration and scrutineer applications. (Note: The application of the ETA does not apply to solemn declarations).
- The ETA applies broadly to most provincial legislation, including Parts 3 and 4 of the LGA. Where there is a requirement to provide information “in writing” the ETA may allow that requirement

to be met by submitting the information electronically in a format that can be accessed in the future (e.g., email, pdf or by entering the information into a website administered by a local government). Under the ETA, statutory requirements for signatures may be met using an “electronic signature.” This allows certain formal documents, such as those requiring the signature of a witness, to be signed remotely and submitted electronically.

- Local governments that have questions around the application of the ETA may wish to seek legal counsel.

### **Nomination Documents**

- Consider expanding public access to nomination documents (electronically or online) to reduce in-person viewing at local government offices.

### **Mail-Ballot Voting**

- Local governments can now support mail ballot voting for all electors if permitted in their election bylaw. Mail-ballot voting may reduce in-person contact and provide an option for people who may be in self-isolation, quarantine, sick or may not be comfortable attending a voting place.

### **Hiring Election Officials**

- Develop strategies to hire enough election officials if there is increased risk of transmission or outbreak in their community.
- Review number of electors for previous by-elections, assent votes, and general local elections at each voting place to help determine the number of election officials that will be required; and
- Include a list of the health and safety precautions in recruitment advertising or provide a link to a webpage with the information.

### **Training Election Officials**

- Hold training in the voting place to familiarize the election officials with safe handling elections procedures and the layout and directional flow of the voting place.
- Consider larger facilities and, if possible, locations with HVAC systems or that provide for fresh air exchange; and
- If desired, provide masks for election staff and volunteers and training on how to properly wear a mask.

### **Elector Registration**

- Consider which method of registration and voters list has the least amount of contact and may reduce line-ups. For example, electors aren’t required to show identification if they are on the Provincial voters list or local government register of electors; and,
- Communicate to the public how to register in advance (if available) for general voting day to reduce the length of time at the voting place.

### **Communication Plan for Electors**

- Consider including health and safety measures in your communication plan (e.g., options to take part in the general local elections);

- Encourage electors to participate in advance voting or to vote at off-peak times at advance, special voting opportunities and on general voting day (for instance, if in previous election events there have been generally fewer electors in the mid-afternoon);
- Outline the health and safety measures in place for advance and general voting day; and,
- Encourage electors to leave the voting place without delay, after they have completed voting.

### **Advance Voting Opportunities**

Consider offering additional advance voting opportunities (if permitted by bylaw) to reduce line-ups and the number of contacts at each voting opportunity.

### **Special Voting Opportunities**

- Conduct early outreach to places where special voting opportunities have been held in the past to understand any protocols in place and address concerns;
- Limit the number of candidate representatives to one and outline protocols that are required at the voting place and additional precautions they may take for the safety of residents; and,
- Consider hiring care home staff as election officials in the long-term care facility they work in.

## **Preparing the Voting Place**

### **Choosing a Voting Place**

- Consider whether the location has an HVAC system in the voting place or provides for fresh air exchange (e.g., open windows/doors); and,
- Post health and safety procedures at the voting place (consider also posting on the local government website).

### **Ballot Box and Ballot Preparation (Materials Handling)**

- Practice proper hand hygiene when setting up ballot boxes and ballots at the voting place; and,
- Instruct elected officials to place the ballot on the table for the elector to pick up.

### **Solemn Declarations at the Voting Place**

- Provide space between the elector and the presiding election official or delegated election official during solemn declarations; and
- Practice hand hygiene.

### **Voting Place Setup**

- Set-up the voting place to reduce high-touch interactions as much as possible;
- Have a greeter at the entrance to educate electors on safety protocols:
  - if a voter is unwell, there may be a need to provide the elector with an alternative form to vote (e.g., curbside).
- Display posters promoting health and safety measures;
- Allow more time for safe set-up of the voting place including:
  - setting up voting booths, tables, chairs, safety barriers, and designating where scrutineers will be placed;
  - marking floors with tape or cones for electors to follow (e.g., directional arrows);
- Have separate entrance and exit points to control the flow of people through the voting place;
- Ensure bathrooms are supplied with soap, water and drying materials so visitors and election officials can wash their hands.

**Voting Assistance**

- Encourage those electors who require assistance to be accompanied by a close contact to vote;
- Suggest election officials wear a mask when assisting an elector to mark their ballot; and,
- Follow procedures for solemn declarations when required at the voting place (e.g., for those assisting to mark a ballot or translate). See above, Solemn Declarations at the Voting Place.

**Ballot Count**

- Encourage election officials handling ballots to practice hand hygiene frequently and to refrain from touching their face; and
- Place marks on the floor where observers may stand and still reasonably view the marks on the ballot while providing election officials space.

For questions related to conducting general local elections or assent votes contact the Ministry's Governance and Structure Branch at: [lggovernance@gov.bc.ca](mailto:lggovernance@gov.bc.ca).

## **Additional Resources**

[Learn more about Local Government Elections](#)

### **Elections BC**

- [SafeVotingPlacesPlan.pdf \(elections.bc.ca\)](#)

### **Province of B.C.**

- [B.C.'s response to COVID-19](#)

### **BC Centre for Disease Control**

- [Communicable Disease Control Manual \(bccdc.ca\)](#)

### **WorkSafeBC Guidelines and Resources**

- [Communicable disease prevention](#)