



Temporary Modifications for Local Government By-elections and Assent Voting During COVID-19

Legislative amendments were made through [Bill 10](#) to support local governments through the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the amendments, the [Elections in Special Circumstances \(COVID-19\) Regulation](#) (the Regulation) was brought into force on July 23, 2021 to allow local governments to temporarily provide exceptions or modifications to Part 3 or 4 of the *Local Government Act* as well as to their election bylaws in relation to the administration of by-elections or assent votes.

The Regulation will enable local governments with council/board vacancies or scheduled assent votes to consider modifying specific election procedures in support of safer election processes. To make any temporary modifications, the Council or Board must pass a resolution to enact the desired provisions under the Regulation. The exemptions will be available to any local government with a council/board vacancy or assent vote scheduled to occur before the Regulation is repealed on March 31, 2022.

Local circumstances (including any guidance from health authorities) and the local government's election bylaw will inform the different approaches that individual local governments may take in holding a by-election or an assent vote to ensure that electors can exercise their right to vote safely.

Local governments can consider enacting any of the following exemptions under the Regulation:

Exemptions	How this provision may assist local governments
Advance Registration	To provide an alternative to same day registration only (to reduce line-ups).
Provincial list of voters	To reduce the amount of contact between electors and election officials and to reduce line-ups.
Advance Voting Dates and Places	To allow the CEO to establish additional dates (to spread out in-person voting) and places (to accommodate locations not available during the pandemic).
Special Voting Opportunities	To provide the CEO with discretion to establish or limit special voting opportunities, and to address safety concerns at venues where special voting is organized (including care homes and hospitals).
Mail-ballot voting	To allow local governments to temporarily offer mail ballot voting (if not already authorized in their election bylaw); to provide the CEO with discretion to establish time limits and/or alternative procedures in relation to mail ballot voting; and to permit secrecy sleeves instead of secrecy envelopes to increase efficiency of processing mail ballots.
Oral Declarations	To enable oral declarations as an alternative to written declarations when signing in the voting book (to reduce a high-touch point).

Recommended Next Steps for Local Governments

- Assess the procedures and processes for a local government by-election or assent vote to create a plan that considers the health and safety recommendations of the PHO, local Medical Health Officer and WorkSafeBC.
- Consider the timing of the by-election or assent vote (the [By-election Date Calculator](#) may help).
- Review applicable election bylaw(s) to determine any challenges or barriers that may affect the safety of the election process and can be temporarily modified under the Regulation.
- If opting-into the Regulation, pass a Council or Board resolution to enact the desired provisions.
- Monitor the most recent orders from the PHO and contact their local Medical Health Officer for further questions about specific circumstances in their region.

Related Resources

Provincial Health Officer (PHO) Orders	Active and previous PHO Orders are available online .
BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC)	The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) is the primary source for COVID-19 health information, including prevention and risk information and commonly asked questions.
WorkSafeBC	WorkSafeBC has developed a Communicable Disease Prevention Guide for Employers.
Ministry of Municipal Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn more about Local Governments and COVID-19• Learn more about Local Government Elections• Contact the Ministry of Municipal Affairs at: lggovernance@gov.bc.ca or at: 250 387-4020.
Local Government Management Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• By-Election resources for BC Local Governments