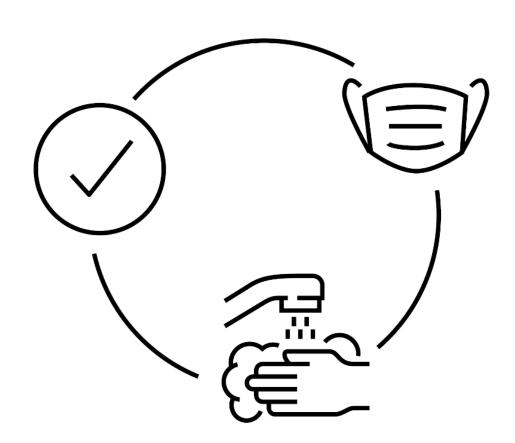# 2021 municipal elections COVID-19 risk reduction guide

Alberta

2021 Municipal Election COVID-19 Risk Reduction Guide

Published by Alberta Municipal Affairs

Disclaimer

The Government of Alberta and Municipal Affairs will not be liable for any damages that result from the use of this guide. While Municipal Affairs attempts to ensure the accuracy of the information contained within this guide, a municipality or candidate may wish to obtain advice from legal counsel in order to ensure the correct steps are taken throughout the election process. Municipal Affairs and the Government of Alberta do not warrant or make any other representations regarding the use, accuracy, applicability, or reliability of this guide.

This guide is not legal advice, and it cannot be used in place of consulting with a lawyer or a public health official. This guide cannot anticipate every aspect, circumstance or situation that municipalities or candidates may encounter while working through their specific election process. If a municipality or candidate needs help finding a lawyer, please visit the Law Society of Alberta website.

Should this guide conflict with the Municipal Government Act (MGA), RSA 2000, Chapter M-26, the Local Authorities Election Act (LAEA), or the public health orders in word or interpretation, the legislation or health orders, as the case may be, shall prevail.
February 2021

=

Classification: Public

Table of Contents

Classification: Public

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic poses many challenges to the way we conduct business and how we carry out our everyday lives. One of these challenges include holding elections safely. As general municipal elections are being held in 2021, it is important to establish processes for conducting these elections in a manner that will reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. This guide is intended to provide general information to returning officers, election workers and candidates in helping to reduce the spread of the virus. The applicability of this guide is dependent on the specific circumstances in each community and at each voting station. As the process of combating the spread of the virus is a fluid one, it may be necessary to further modify the processes outlined in this guide to comply with health orders or to adhere to current best practices. Additionally, as has happened in the past, different regions of the province may be under different health restrictions and this may impact how certain election-related activities can be carried-out.

For the most up-to-date information on the COVID-19 situation in Alberta, visit: alberta.ca/covid19.

Election Procedures

Candidates and Campaign Workers

While Out Campaigning

Candidates and campaign workers are allowed to canvas door-to-door and at stationary tables and booths in public places provided they follow all public health orders, local bylaws (and any other election procedures of their municipality). The risk of spreading COVID-19 can be reduced by:

- Following social distancing rules.

- Wearing a mask.

- Not sharing materials such as printed campaign materials.

- Avoiding touching surfaces, such as doors and handles, whenever possible.

- Frequent hand sanitization, especially before or after touching surfaces.

- Frequent cleaning of high-touch services.

Classification: Public

- Using plexiglass barriers when attending a stationary campaign booth or table.

- Supplying hand sanitizer at public campaign booths and tables.

Voting Station Selection/Set-up

When Choosing the Location of Voting Stations

When choosing a location to serve as a voting station, it is recommended to consider several factors to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19. Consider:

- Is there sufficient room to achieve social distancing orders and manage the flow of people through the voting stations?

- Is there a separate entry and exit to help facilitate social distancing by better controlling the flow of traffic?

- Can the station be set-up in such a manner that workers are able to carry-out their duties while maintaining social distancing from other staff, voters and scrutineers to the highest degree possible?

- Is there sufficient room to locate scrutineers in such a manner that they are able to scrutinize the process while complying with all safety procedures?

- Is the location large enough to accommodate large line-ups indoors while maintaining the necessary social distancing?

- Is there easy access to hand-washing facilities for election workers?

- Is there a suitable location near the entrance to locate a hand-sanitizer/disposable mask station for use by the electors and campaign staff?

Using Multiple Voting Stations/Expanding Advance Vote

It is likely that actions taken to adhere to public health orders and reduce the risk of infection, such as sanitizing hands and increasing the distance between voting stations will cause an increase in the time it takes individuals to vote. This may be further impacted by the potential for the inclusion of a provincial Senate election and/or referendum on the ballot for 2021. This increased time it takes to vote may lead to longer lines and increased crowding at voting stations. Two ways to reduce crowding and facilitate social distancing is to increase the number of voting stations used and to increase the number of advance votes that are held. These options are

resource-dependent and can increase the cost staffing, advertising, building rent, etc.; however, where it's a viable option, it warrants consideration.

If you are considering increasing the number of voting stations, it is important to consult sections 36 and 37 of the *Local Authorities Elections Act (LAEA)* regarding the process for establishing voting subdivisions and the process for establishing multiple voting stations within a voting subdivision. The latter requires a bylaw passed by council prior to June 30 of a general election year.

Advanced voting has gained in popularity in recent elections as an alternative to voting only on election day. Having more advance voting times provides a means to spread out the vote so it is easier to facilitate social distancing. Consult sections 73 to 75 of the *LAEA* for advance vote requirements.

Voting Station Set-up/Operating Procedures

The following procedures are recommended for setting-up and operating the voting station:

- **Masks** - All election staff should be required to wear masks at all times while at the voting station, other than while eating;

- **Social distancing** - When setting up, election staff should maintain social distancing (i.e. at least 2 metres of separation) whenever possible.

- **Cleaning/sanitizing** - At set-up, and at regular intervals throughout the day, tables and chairs should be cleaned and disinfected (with disinfectant wipes or spray). Cleaning should occur as frequently as possible. It may be desirable to consider dedicating staff specifically for carrying out cleaning duties, as well as other duties identified within this guide.

- **COVID-19 Signage** - Put-up COVID-19 AHS advisory signage on the voting station entrance to remind attendees to physically distance and wear masks within the facility. Current health orders may require specific kinds of signage. Ensure all current public health orders are complied with.

- **Floor markings** - Use floor markers/markings such as tape or pylons to help direct the flow of participants and maintain sufficient distancing (e.g. one-way aisles, X where to stand).

- **Sanitizer stations** - At the station entrance, provide a table with hand sanitizer, wipes and disposable masks. Ensure someone is assigned to check on the supply periodically. Also, provide a waste receptacle at the exit for mask disposal. You may also wish to set-up hand sanitizer by the exit to encourage people to utilize it upon both entry and exit.

- **Pens/pencils** - Carry an ample supply of pens for registration and pencils for voting. Issue pens and pencils to users in such a manner that, after use, they are deposited in a container. The pens and pencils can then be sanitized and placed back into service. Alternatively, you may wish to allow the participants to keep the writing instruments provided to them, although this may prove to be cost prohibitive, in which case sanitizing the pens and pencils in lots may be a less expensive option.

- **Transparent barriers** - Use transparent plastic barriers to separate staff from participants wherever possible. This would be similar to the barriers set-up at public businesses such as grocery stores. These barriers should be sanitized regularly throughout the day.

- **Presentation of ID** - Station workers should avoid touching presented ID whenever possible. If a worker touches the ID or documents or items from a participant, they should wash or sanitize their hands as soon as possible thereafter.

- **Washroom facilities** - Washrooms facilities should be cleaned periodically throughout the day, especially if they are made available to the public. Cleaning should include any surface likely to be touched, including taps and door handles.

- **Meals for voting station workers** - Voting station workers should refrain from eating at the table where they are working. If possible, establish a location within the facility where workers may eat (on rotation, if possible). After eating, a worker should sanitize the table and chair at which they ate and wash or sanitize their hands.

- **Glove use** - You may wish to consider whether or not to allow for the use of gloves. Although gloves may provide protection to a voting station worker, gloves also pose some drawbacks. If gloves are not properly worn and removed, they may promote rather than reduce virus spread. As well, a glove which touches one surface may transfer contaminants to another surface. Due to these concerns, glove use should be carefully considered before proceeding. Glove use is not a replacement for handwashing and sanitizing.

Communicating with Voters/Candidates

One of the best ways to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 in the election process is through effective communication with the public. Consider posting information on the municipal website and/or local newspaper regarding how the stations will be set-up and how the voting public can do their part to help prevent the spread. Ensure any messaging incorporates any relevant health orders in effect at the time.

If applicable, communication encouraging voters to attend advance voting to help spread-out the voting crowd is also advisable.

Classification: Public

Resources

Legislative Resources

Below are links to relevant governing legislation, as well as links to the public health orders in place.

- *Local Authorities Election Act*: https://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/L21.pdf

- *Municipal Government Act*: https://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/acts/m26.pdf

- Public Health Orders: https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-orders-and-legislation.aspx

- COVID-19 for Alberta Guidance Documents: https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx

Other Provincial/Federal COVID-19 Election Guides

- Elections Canada:
  https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=med&dir=cor&document=index&lang=e

- Elections Ontario:
  https://www.elections.on.ca/en/resource-centre/reports-and-publications.html

- Elections Nova Scotia:
  https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/COVID-19-Guidelines-for-Administering-an-Election.pdf

- Elections Saskatchewan:
  https://www.elections.sk.ca/voters/covid-19/

Municipal Affairs – Contact Information

For additional support, please contact Municipal Advisory Services:

- 780-427-2225 (toll-free in Alberta by dialing 310-0000 first)

- email: ma.lgsmail@gov.ab.ca

Classification: Public