

APPENDIX A

6 May Elections 2021: COVID Secure Measures

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Introduction: Infection Opportunities in an Election

Despite the Pandemic, the safe and effective conduct of free and fair elections is a crucial aspect of democracy. This guide aims to enable elections to be conducted as safely as possible.

The elections will take place at a time when COVID-19 continues to present risks to public health.

Depending on the infection rate, measures taken to control the spread of the virus may change as we approach May and so this initial guidance will be subject to change.

The electoral commission have published key considerations for the delivery of May 2021 polls: polling stations.

National guidance on working safely during coronavirus, managing visitors at events etc. is not written specifically with elections in mind but the wider controls detailed within these documents can be applied to the election.

Elections present multiple opportunities for transmission of COVID, of varying risk. These are summarised below, alongside key strategies.

Postal voting exposes electors to the least amount of risk to catching COVID-19 from all the voting methods. Proxy voting obviously reduces the risk to an elector, but of course their proxy would attend the polling station on their behalf and would therefore be exposed to the same risk as the elector if they themselves had attended the polling station. As per the Electoral Commission communications plan Councils should promote all three options to electors, rather than promote one specific voting method. Promoting one method above others e.g. postal voting above voting in person could draw the (Local) Returning Officer into an avoidable public debate around voting methods. It should be the voter's choice how they vote, and the (Local) Returning Officer's staff will work to promote all forms of voting equally, and make all voting methods as safe as possible.

Aspect of Election	Infective Opportunities	Key Strategies
Back office work (eg preparing and sending out postal votes)	Close contact Touch points Handling equipment/materials used by others	Face coverings & social distancing Cleanliness Hand hygiene
Canvassing	Close contact	Face coverings & social distancing

Hustings	Close contact	Face coverings & social distancing
Postal Vote Return and Counting	Close contact Touch points Handling equipment/materials used by others	Face coverings & social distancing. Room ventilation maximised. Cleanliness Hand hygiene
In Person Polling Stations (Staff)	Close contact from electors Touch points Handling equipment/materials used by others	Face coverings (all), visors (staff), screens and social distancing. Screens between electors and staff. Room ventilation maximised. Cleanliness Hand hygiene
In Person Polling Stations (Voters)	Close contact from electors Touch points (door handles, pencils, ballot papers) Handling equipment/materials used by others	Face coverings & social distancing & screens between electors and staff (Clear signage to promote the above). Staff to wear visors also. Room ventilation maximised. Clean touch points regularly Promote electors to bring their own pencil/pen. Shared pencils sanitised between use. Encourage electors to show their polling card to polling staff, rather than hand it to them, and to take them away with them. Hand hygiene: all electors to clean their hands on entry

		and exit to the polling station
Ballot Box Collection and Distribution to Counting Centres	<p>Close contact</p> <p>Touch points</p> <p>Handling equipment/materials used by others</p>	<p>Face coverings, visors & social distancing, where possible. Room ventilation maximised.</p> <p>Touch points to be cleaned regularly</p> <p>Hand hygiene: all staff to clean their hands on entry and exit to the venue, and regularly whilst on site.</p>
Counting Centres (Counting Processes and Staff)	<p>Close contact</p> <p>Touch points</p> <p>Handling equipment/materials used by others</p>	<p>Face coverings, visors & social distancing, where possible. Seated staff to be separated by screens, where possible. Room ventilation maximised.</p> <p>Touch points to be cleaned regularly</p> <p>Hand hygiene: all staff to clean their hands on entry and exit to the venue, and regularly whilst on site.</p>
Counting Centres (Election Agents and Candidates)	<p>Close contact</p> <p>Crowding risk e.g. adjudication, around count tables, results, verification (largest number of attendees could be present)</p> <p>Touch points</p> <p>Handling equipment/materials used by others</p>	<p>Face coverings (all), social distancing, where possible. Room ventilation maximised.</p> <p>No guests permitted (subject to LRO agreement)</p> <p>Screens for adjudication between staff and attendees</p> <p>Touch points to be cleaned regularly</p>

		Hand hygiene: all attendees to clean their hands on entry and exit to the venue, and regularly whilst on site.
Counting Centres (Refreshments and Rest Areas)	<p>Close contact</p> <p>Touch points</p> <p>Handling equipment/materials used by others</p>	<p>Face coverings whilst collecting or transporting food/drink, social distancing, where possible. Food and drink to be consumed outside, or inside 2m apart with room ventilation maximised.</p> <p>Touch points to be cleaned regularly</p> <p>Hand hygiene: all staff to clean their hands on entry and exit to the venue, and regularly whilst on site.</p>
Vulnerable Staff		Risk assessment of vulnerable staff

Election COVID-19 Secure Co-Ordination

1. The relevant Deputy Local Returning Officer will oversee the health and safety and risk assessments for COVID secure activities for their respective local election area.
2. Every Polling Station will have a COVID-secure monitor, the Presiding Officer, who will be responsible for checking and adhering to COVID secure measures at that location on polling day.
3. Every Count Centre will have a COVID-secure lead, the relevant Deputy Local Returning Officer, who will be responsible for ensuring the risk assessment, safe running and operation of the count.

Risk assessment

An assessment on each venue must be conducted and proportionate control measures implemented to limit the transmission of COVID. These controls should follow the 'normal' health and safety hierarchy of controls to reduce the risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level.

- 1) Minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing.
- 2) Clean hands thoroughly and regularly.
- 3) Wear a face covering.
- 4) Self-isolate and get tested where necessary.
- 5) Clear communication to all (including voters) to help ensure those with symptoms / self-isolating stay at home and do not attend in person.
- 6) Introduce enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents / disinfectants.
- 7) Keeping occupied spaces well ventilated.
- 8) Where necessary, based on risk assessment wear additional appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

Key Communications Messages

Conducting a COVID secure election needs clear communications. Below is an initial checklist of which audiences need which messages.

Audience	Which Messages
Voters	Voting options
	Vote COVID Secure
	If you're unwell, register for a proxy vote
Polling Station Staff	Conducting safe polling
	If you are unwell
	How to handle an infected or self-isolating voter
Political Agents and Candidates	COVID secure behaviours at Polling Stations and Count
Count Staff	Your role in a COVID Secure Election

Key Considerations for Polling Stations

Early assessment about the suitability of any venue being used for election activities, should be undertaken in order to identify any necessary adaptations.

Spacing requirements

The venue size and layout should:

- Enable staff, candidate/agents and electors to maintain a safe space of two metres from each other at all times.
- Try to provide one entrance and a different exit to help with traffic flow, where possible.
- Provide good ventilation as per [HSE guidance](#)

Infection control measures

Infection control measures include, but are not limited to:

- Management and social distancing when queuing
- Treat every voter as potentially infected
- Providing access to handwashing facilities and placing hand sanitizing dispensers in prominent locations throughout the venue.
- The wearing of face coverings
- Frequently cleaning high touch surfaces throughout the day such as voting booths, desks, writing instruments, seating areas.
- If possible, provide an alternative voting method such as mail-in or online voting to decrease the number of people at polling stations.
- Encourage voters who are ill to stay home and use an alternative voting method.

Face coverings

The use of face-coverings will be required for all individuals in a polling station (unless they are subject to an exemption or are a member of staff working behind an individual screen) in line with [government regulations](#). Staff working behind a screen will still be requested to wear a face covering. Visors will be provided to all staff.

Whilst the majority of voters will likely be in possession of their own personal face covering, and will have been encouraged to bring it with them to vote, a stock of masks will be available to provide to those who have not brought their own face covering, and people should be advised to dispose of these face coverings themselves after they have left the polling station.

Queuing and Social Distancing

Remind voters upon arrival to leave space between themselves and others. Encourage voters to stay at least 2 M apart. Polling stations should have signs, or other visual cues such as floor markings, tape, or chalk marks to help voters and workers remember this.

The Presiding Officer will encourage social distancing to be maintained when queues form. Additional staff will be provided to facilitate this, where required and where resources allow.

Clearly mark points of entry and exit to avoid bottlenecks.

A 'greeter' will be deployed where resources allow to control queues and manage entry to the busiest stations for social distancing purposes, as well as to encourage voters and other attendees to the polling station to abide by the public health measures in place, such as the wearing of face coverings and sanitising their hands on entry.

Additional signage – signs will be used to remind attendees and staff of the need to follow public health guidelines such as social distancing, the wearing of face-coverings and only entering if symptom-free

Keeping the Station as a whole clean

Regular cleaning throughout the day of touchpoints, such as doors, polling booths desk surfaces etc. Using disinfectant spray and disposable paper towel or disinfectant wipes.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, use of personal protective equipment, storage).

Polling staff will be expected to carry out cleaning of stations. Additional cleaning of venues will be arranged, where needed e.g. at the busiest stations, where resources allow.

Voter Registration Desk Principles

Hand sanitiser - Hand sanitiser should be available on desks for staff.

Perspex screens – Government guidance states that if steps have been taken in line with Health and Safety Executive guidance for COVID-19 secure workplaces to create a physical barrier between workers and members of the public, then staff behind the barrier will not be required to wear a face covering. However, we are recommending that staff wear face coverings, and we will provide visors for them to wear.

There is no test and trace requirement to record the contact details of those entering a polling station for the purposes of voting, even where the polling station is located in a

building where it would usually be required. Nevertheless, Presiding Officers will maintain a clear audit trail of all those who are present in polling stations for the purpose of observing proceedings in their log book.

Preventing Infection in Polling Booths

Provide access to hand washing facilities and have hand sanitiser available for use both on entry to and exit from the venue, with voters encouraged to clean their hands on entry and exit.

Signage in place to remind attendees of good hygiene practices and social distancing.

Preventing Infection when casting the Ballot

In the event of a coughing or sneezing fit

Welfare facilities for Polling station staff

Polling station staff will be required to take breaks at less busy times and to maintain social distancing.

Staff will be encouraged to wash their hands frequently (e.g., before entering the polling location, before and after breaks after touching or handling masks or PPE, after using the toilet, after touching shared surfaces or objects) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds,.

Social Distancing

Presiding Officers will encourage social distancing to be maintained when queues form, and extra staff will be deployed to the busiest stations.

Clearly mark points of entry and exit to avoid bottlenecks.

Discourage voters and workers from greeting others with physical contact (e.g., handshakes). Include this reminder on signs about social distancing.

Maintaining Safe Buildings and Surfaces

Disinfect surfaces

Surfaces that are frequently touched by multiple people, for example door handles, registration tables, pens, and clipboards, should be disinfected frequently using alcohol or antiviral wipes or spray

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, use of personal protective equipment, storage).

If the surface is dirty, it should be cleaned before disinfecting.

After the polling station closes, clean and disinfect all facility areas and items, including all tables, chairs, door handles, used by poll workers or voters. The facility can be returned to normal use immediately with no additional precautions.

Clean and disinfect voting-associated equipment

Disinfect the ballot box touch points before they are collected or moved

Shared objects

Minimise the use of any shared objects, documents and papers

Staff to avoid touching their faces and regularly and frequently clean their hands.

Minimise handling of shared objects. Voters will be encouraged to bring their own pen or pencil to the polling station. Stock of single use pencils to be provided which would be put in a 'dirty' container after use and then be disinfected between users.

Ventilation

Ensure that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible, for example by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk to poll workers, voters, or children accompanying voters.

Crowd and queue management

Minimise queues as much as possible, especially tightly spaced queues in small indoor spaces. Use floor markings and signs to remind voters to maintain social distancing while in a queue.

Modified layouts and procedures

Whatever the size of the venue determine a layout which ensures that social distancing can be maintained between staff and voters.

Modify the polling location layout where possible to ensure voters move in one direction while in voting locations and to avoid bottlenecks, such as single doors for entry and exit, where possible

Items to be reviewed, such as poll cards, should be shown through the screen or placed on a table for examination to minimise handling.

Physical barriers and guides

Physical barriers, such as screens, can be used to protect workers and voters when physical distance cannot be maintained, for example at desks.

Consider placing markings on the floor to remind voters to maintain at least 2M of space from other voters and workers.

Protect people at increased risk for severe illness

Polling locations (e.g., libraries, schools) should ensure that voters can be separated from other facility users. For example, polling staff and voters can use designated entrances, exits, and toilets that are separate from other facility users.

Limit nonessential visitors. Voters should be discouraged from bringing accompanying persons (e.g., family members, friends) to the polling location.

Election staff at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 should be risk assessed and if possible be assigned tasks that minimise direct contact with voters and other poll staff. These workers should be encouraged to practice preventive actions, such as social distancing and handwashing.

voters with symptoms

Voters with symptoms will not be allowed to enter the polling station. Alternative voting options for voters with symptoms, those who are sick or known COVID-19 positive may register for a proxy vote up until 5pm on polling day.

Post signs to discourage anyone with symptoms from entering the polling location buildings and provide voting options for those with symptoms. Ensure that any signage is accessible to voters with disabilities, for example by providing large print or braille versions or having audible messages with the same information.

Key Considerations for Counting Operations

Spacing requirements

The maximum capacity of venues will be determined.

The venue size and layout should:

- Enable staff, permitted attendees and electors to maintain a safe space of two metres from each other at all times.
- One entrance and a different exit to help with traffic flow will be used where available
- Good ventilation will be provided, where possible, as per [HSE guidance](#)

Physical distancing (2 metres) requirements will apply in an outdoor setting.

Infection control measures

Infection control measures include, but are not limited to:

- Providing access to handwashing facilities and placing hand sanitising dispensers in prominent locations throughout the venue.
- Frequently cleaning high touch surfaces such as desks, toilets, writing instruments, seating areas and counters.
- Voters who are ill encouraged to stay home and use an alternative voting method.
- Face coverings are mandatory, unless exempt

Non-staff present at the Count including candidates and agents

Attendance limited to candidates, agents, and permitted attendees only.

Staff working at the Count

Any scope for working in 'cohorts' or 'bubbles' (to limit social interaction as per [HSE guidance on working safely during the coronavirus outbreak](#))

Staff will have breaks when there is a natural break in proceeding. These will be staggered to avoid any impact on the efficiency of the verification and count processes and to support with maintaining social distancing.

Staff to maintain their distance throughout including during visits to the toilet, coffee or meal breaks etc.

Arrival of ballot papers and tipping out

Hand sanitiser to be provided on any desk or table where staff may be working with paper. Everyone working with shared documents and papers should take great care to avoid touching their faces, and regularly and frequently wash / sanitise their hands.

Election staff will be provided with masks/visors to wear.

Counting Tables – physical and social barriers to infection

- The screens returned from polling stations will be placed in front of and before counting tables to separate staff working at counting tables and those observing. Screens must not impact on candidates' and agents' ability to oversee the proceedings.
- Social distancing of seated counters will be maintained.
- Where social distancing cannot be maintained e.g. count supervisors tipping out ballot papers then masks and visors will be provided.

Cleaning inside Count venues

- Regular cleaning of touch points will be carried out at count venues.

Refreshment areas

- Social distancing will be maintained at refreshment facilities.
- Hand sanitiser will be provided for attendees to use before and after using refreshment facilities.
- Facilities for refreshments will be provided outdoors, if possible.

Risk Assessment of Vulnerable Staff

Good risk assessment of staff who may be vulnerable is essential. It is particularly important to risk assess some categories of staff, and take steps to mitigate risk.

Currently those staff who are CEV must remain at home and CV could attend with individual risk assessments, come May the situation on shielding should be relaxed however the need for individual risk assessments for those who are CV is still likely.

Advice on risk mitigation can be taken from Health and Safety or Infection Control Colleagues.

The Health and Safety Executive guidance is important to consider but does not provide individual level risk assessment tools

- The Welsh Government has produced a generic risk assessment tool which is useful <https://gov.wales/COVID-19-workforce-risk-assessment-tool>
- the Scottish Government tool is also helpful for risk assessing individual staff and includes age characteristics <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-COVID-19-guidance-on-individual-risk-assessment-for-the-workplace/>
- The ALAMA guidance provides an individual level calculator <https://alama.org.uk/COVID-19-medical-risk-assessment/>

Particular attention should be paid to risk assessing:

- Staff with underlying health conditions especially immune conditions, inflammatory conditions like diabetes, heart disease, asthma etc and staff who are very overweight
- Staff who smoke
- Staff over 50 years of age
- Staff who are pregnant <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/COVID-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/#coronavirus>
- BAME Staff. The ALAMA calculator is the preferred tool <https://alama.org.uk/COVID-19-medical-risk-assessment/>
 - the Greater Manchester risk assessment tool: <https://psnc.org.uk/greater-manchester-lpc/wp-content/uploads/sites/118/2020/04/GM-BAME-Risk-Assessment-v6.pdf>

Key Advice for Voters: How to Vote Safely¹

The virus that causes COVID-19, is mostly spread by respiratory droplets released when people talk, cough, or sneeze. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

Personal prevention practices (keeping 2metre distance from others, wearing a face covering, handwashing, staying home when sick) and environmental cleaning and disinfection are important actions you can take to help lower the risk of COVID-19 spread.

There are different voting options

Voting in person

Postal voting

Proxy voting

Vote early to avoid crowds

Voting at a quieter time when the polling stations are less crowded is recommended, such as late mornings, lunchtime or early afternoons. Please avoid 8.30-10.30am and 5-7.30pm.

Protect yourself with masks, 2 metre distance and hand sanitiser

The best things you can do to stay safe when voting are what you're already doing every day:

- Keep at least 2m distance from other people
- Wear a face mask at all times, especially if you're inside with others.
- Avoid touching your mask or face UNLESS you have just cleaned your hands
- Sanitise (or wash) your hands before AND AFTER you cast your vote

You are encouraged to bring your own pen or pencil to mark your ballot paper.

Pay attention to posted information signs

Please read the signage outside polling stations before entering.

¹ Sources: USCDC, France, Italy and Germany and the University of Chicago School of Medicine

Consider how you will get there

If you're able to, avoid public transport during rush hour and if you are taking a bus or taxi make sure you're wearing a mask and the driver is too. It's best to keep the windows down so there's lots of fresh air in the vehicle.

Plan to wait

It's common to face short queues during elections at busier periods, but the social distancing requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic mean longer waits may be all but inevitable in some locations. Polling staff will do their best to keep queues to a minimum. Please be patient.

Make sure you're feeling well

While COVID-19 can cause severe illness, it can also have very mild forms that seem more like seasonal allergies. If you're sick, you absolutely need to stay home and avoid people.

I know it can be intimidating to go into a crowded place right now, especially when you don't have control of other people's safety precautions. But the important thing to remember is that there are steps you can take to stay safe when you're casting your vote.

If you are self-isolating

If you are self-isolating before the election day, try to register for a postal or proxy vote. If you are self-isolating on election day you will not be permitted to leave your house to vote. You may register to apply for a proxy vote (where you apply for someone you trust to vote on your behalf) up until 5pm on polling day.