



Wisconsin Elections Commission

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TO: All Wisconsin Election Officials

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SUBJECT: Public Health Procedures for In-Person Absentee Voting

This guidance is provided for Municipal Clerks in light of the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Wisconsin. COVID-19 is spread primarily through respiratory droplets that are released when a sick (infected) person coughs, sneezes, or breathes. These droplets can also remain on surfaces for an extended period of time. Specifically, smaller aerosols can linger in the air for an extended period of time, but larger droplets generally fall out of the air quickly. However, droplets can remain on surfaces for an extended period of time, depending upon the surface. This information should be used to inform and develop the procedures used for in-person absentee voting for the 2020 November General Election.



Photo credit: Daniel Acker/reuters

Due to the nature of how COVID-19 spreads and the requirement to offer in-person absentee voting prior to each election, the following factors should be emphasized when developing your plan:

1. Face coverings must be used by election officials when conducting in-person absentee voting under the Governor's mandate.
2. Face coverings are strongly recommended for voters but cannot be required. No voter should be turned away for refusal to wear a mask or face covering.
3. Drive up, outdoor or curbside voting options should be considered to minimize congestion in enclosed spaces.
4. Hand hygiene is essential for voters and election officials during in-person absentee voting.
5. CARES Act subgrant funds may be used to support many of the costs associated with changes to in-person absentee voting. Costs such as additional staff, staff time and sanitation supplies are eligible uses for these funds. More information on the WEC CARES Act subgrant program can be found here: <https://elections.wi.gov/WEC-CARES-subgrant>.

This information is provided for use when developing or updating your plans for in-person absentee voting for November. The concepts and suggestions in this document should serve as a guide when developing a process and set up that works for your municipality.

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Choosing a Space and Setting Up

It may be necessary to use a different space in the building designated for in-person absentee voting other than the actual clerk's office. The clerk may choose a larger space in the facility that could be set up to allow for adequate space between election officials and voters. Face to face interactions should take place behind barriers such as windows or using tabletop plexiglass shields. Painters tape should be used to mark the floor in six-foot sections anywhere a line is expected to form to encourage proper spacing between voters and election officials. The voter flow for the room should be set up for one-way traffic, if possible, to allow voters to enter through one entrance and exit through another.

Reminder: All in-person absentee voting sites for the November General Election were required to be set by June 11, 2020 (<https://elections.wi.gov/node/6971>).

An alternate area of the facility could also be used for symptomatic voters who would like to vote during in-person absentee voting. These alternate areas would minimize contact between symptomatic voters and other voters and clerk staff. Curbside voting is also an option for these voters and may be encouraged, but not required.

Symptoms of COVID-19 and Signage

People with confirmed COVID-19 infections have a range of symptoms, from little to no symptoms to people being severely ill. Symptoms may include:

- Fever (over 100.4F)
- Cough
- Shortness of breath body aches
- Fatigue
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Nasal congestion
- Sore Throat
- Nausea or vomiting

For in-person absentee voting, Municipal Clerks should post a set of questions at the entrance to the clerk's office that asks if the voter is experiencing any of those symptoms or have been exposed to a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19. To limit potential spread within a confined space like the clerk's office, if someone is experiencing symptoms they should be directed to call a phone number on the sign and then the clerk could direct the symptomatic voter to the alternative area or offer a curbside voting option outside of the building, as suggested by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

Practice and Enforce "Social Distancing"

Limit physical contact among clerk's office staff and voters by creating a process flow that incorporates "social distancing" and keeping people at least 6 feet apart. Train any staff assisting with voting on these procedures and have them assist with enforcing social distancing standards.

- Maintain 6 feet of distance between voter and clerk, or other staff when possible.
- If there is a line for voting, assure social distancing measures are followed by having volunteers to monitor, or using tape on the ground or other markers every 6 feet to show where voters should stand to maintain proper social distancing.
- Use plexiglass, plastic or barriers made of other materials in areas where face-to-face interactions occur.
- Refrain from greeting others with physical contact (e.g., handshakes, hugs, etc.).

- Provide signs to help voters and workers remember social distancing guidelines.

Clean and Disinfect Hands, Surfaces, and Objects

- Have hand sanitizer present and request voters use it before and after handling voting materials.
- Ensure bathrooms at the clerk's office are supplied adequately with soap, water, and drying materials so visitors and staff can wash their hands before and after voting.
- Limit surface contacts and disinfect regularly.
 - Keep entrance doors open if possible, to minimize knobs, handles, etc. that voters need to touch.
 - Consider the use of wipeable covers for electronics.
 - Clean frequently touched surfaces, voting booths, and objects after each voter, if possible (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles). See the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [recommendations for election specific cleaning and disinfection webpage](#).
 - Provide single-use pens, suggest voters bring own pens, or sanitize pens using [Wisconsin Department of Health Services disinfecting information](#).
- Workers handling ballots and forms should practice [hand hygiene](#) frequently.

Outdoor, Curbside or Drive Up Options

Outdoor, curbside and/or drive up in-person absentee voting options can also be considered. Outdoor in-person absentee voting allows voters to walk up and cast their absentee ballot, while curbside or drive up voting allows voters to remain in their vehicle while casting their absentee ballot. Curbside in-person absentee voting must be available for any voter that is physically unable to enter the site. These setups allow for increased air flow and circulation which eliminates some of the transmission risk associated with enclosed spaces. They also can limit face-to-face interactions with voters voting from the safety of their vehicle. Election officials conducting voting should wear face coverings and voters should be encouraged to use face coverings as well. Clerks considering these in-person absentee voting options will need to develop a process that works for their expected voter volume and their staffing and resources.



Photo credit: Nichols Pfosi/reuters

Consider the following factors when developing your plan:

1. Use signage to direct voters to the appropriate areas of the parking lot or outside of the facility where voting will take place.
2. A phone number should be provided for voters if the outdoor voting area will not be staffed continuously during voting hours.
3. Potential voters must be greeted to determine if they are at the facility to vote. The voter's name and address will need to be collected during this interaction.
4. Each voter's registration will have to be verified prior to issuing them a ballot. MyVote, WisVote and poll books may be used for this purpose.
5. The correct ballot style, for municipalities who have more than one, will have to be determined for each voter. MyVote, WisVote and poll books may also be used for this purpose.
6. Photo ID will have to be verified for each voter who requests a ballot during in-person absentee voting.

7. A writing surface such as a table or clipboard should be provided and should be sanitized after each use.
8. The election official conducting in-person absentee voting should serve as the witness for these voters and sign the certificate envelope and provide their municipal address just as they would for indoor voting in the clerk's office.
9. Voted ballots must be securely stored and transported from the outdoor voting area to the designated storage space in the clerk's office.

How can this process work?

- “Runners” can be used to greet voters outside and collect information from the voter, such as their name and address, to bring inside to the clerk's office for verification.
- Voters should be asked to sanitize their hands before handling voting materials such as clipboards, ballots, envelopes and pens.
- Clerk's office staff can be used to verify the voter's registration information provided by the “runner” and review the photo ID to confirm eligibility.
- Clerk's staff can determine the correct ballot style for the voter and provide it to the runner to bring out to the voter.
- Chain of custody procedures should be used to track ballots that have been issued and voted during outdoor voting.
- A tent or other shelter can be set up to provide a space for voters and election officials to safely interact and conduct voting.



Photo credit: Morry Gash/AP

Curbside or Drive Up Voting Procedures:

Here are some procedures that should be incorporated into any curbside or drive up process developed for in-person absentee voting:

- Hand sanitizer or sanitizing spray should be offered to curbside or drive up voters to clean their hands before they vote their ballot or fill out a voter registration form.
- Face to face interactions are required for this process, but they should be minimized by verifying information through a vehicle window, keeping interactions brief and limiting conversation to essential voting-related discussion.
- If verbal interactions are needed with a vehicle window rolled down, election officials should wear a face covering if they cannot remain at least six feet from the voter.
- Pens used by curbside or drive up voters should be discarded or sanitized after each use.
- The election official should be close enough to verify the photo ID but do not have handle it. The photo ID can be verified through the glass of the rolled-up window.
- The ballot and certificate envelope should be slid through a window that has been slightly rolled down or “cracked”. The ballot and envelope can be placed on a clipboard which is passed to the voter.
- The voter can then fill out their ballot, place it in the certificate envelope and seal it using an envelope moistener.
- The voter should be instructed to sign their ballot in the appropriate section of the certificate envelope.

- The voter should then slide the envelope back through the window to the election official. A suggested option is using a bucket or other method for the voter to drop the ballot out a crack in the window while maintaining privacy.
- Election officials should provide the required witness signature and address and information on the certificate envelope and transport the voted ballot back to the clerk's office for secure storage.
- Any clipboards, writing surfaces, envelope moisteners, pens or other materials used for this process should be sanitized after each use.

Protect Yourself and Others by Following Everyday Preventive Measures

For all employees of the clerk's office and any election observers during in-person absentee voting:

- Face coverings are required if there is a state or local health order or directive from a municipality requiring a face covering at the locations in which voting is occurring either in-person absentee or at a polling location. The Governor's Executive Order, issued on July 30, 2020, requires facial coverings when Wisconsin citizens are in enclosed spaces or are outdoors when physical distancing is not possible.
- Wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Clean and/or disinfect any accessible voting equipment used for in-person absentee voting after each use according to the procedures provided by the vendor.

For voters entering the clerk's office:

- Face coverings for voters are recommended, but not required for voters during in-person absentee voting.
- Provide opportunities for voters to wash or sanitize their hands both before and after voting.
- Provide curbside or outdoor voting opportunities for symptomatic, at-risk or immunocompromised voters.
- Conduct any face-to-face interactions with voters from behind a protective barrier, such as glass or plastic window or tabletop plastic shield.

Face covering recommendations:

- Wash your hands before putting on your face covering.
- Put it over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin.
- Try to fit it snugly against the sides of your face.
- Make sure you can breathe easily.
- Don't put the face covering around your neck or up on your forehead.
- Don't touch the face covering, and, if you do, wash your hands or use hand sanitizer to disinfect.
- Handle the face covering by the straps to avoid possible cross contamination.
- Wash or sanitize your hands after removing your face covering.

Additional Information on COVID-19 is available from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/index.htm>) and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>).