



# Wisconsin Elections Commission

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**DATE:** For the November 18, 2020 Commission Meeting

**TO:** Members, Wisconsin Elections Commission

**FROM:** Meagan Wolfe                      Richard Rydecki  
Administrator                      Deputy Administrator

**SUBJECT:** Public Health Guidance for Recount Proceedings

In preparation for a statewide recount Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) staff has worked with a public health professional from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to develop suggested procedures for counties to apply to recount planning and setup efforts. These procedures follow the same concepts we have stressed throughout the 2020 elections that have been conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Public health considerations such as hand hygiene, face coverings, social distancing and COVID-19 symptom screenings should be incorporated into any recount setup. New considerations must be made to account for how recounts differ from administering voting at polling places or during the in-person absentee period.

Conducting a recount requires a significant number of people to be present in the same room or facility, including Board of Canvass members, tabulators, candidate representatives, public observers and other staff to assist with administrative and security-related tasks. The recount timeline also requires participants to be present in enclosed areas for long periods of time until the recount is complete. State law requires any recount to be completed within 13 days of the issuance of the recount order and several counties have expressed they will need the majority of that time to complete all required procedures before the deadline. In addition, a recount requires tabulators and Board of Canvass members to work within close proximity of one another and allows candidate representatives to be close enough to review each ballot before it is tabulated. All of these factors were presented to the public health official who assisted with the development of this guidance and have been considered in the procedures outlined below.

## Space Considerations

In order to keep all participants and observers spaced out appropriately during the recount, counties have had to consider securing a larger space during their planning process. Additional space provides the ability to space out tables where tabulators are working while still allowing for multiple reporting units or municipalities to be recounted at the same time. WEC staff has discussed this option on several calls with county clerks in preparation for the recount and many indicated they identified and reserved larger spaces to conduct the recount.

The use of a larger space was confirmed as a recommended option by DHS as the larger space will allow for increased airflow that prevent aerosols from building up throughout the day. Any practices that increase the percentage of outdoor air in the recount space are recommended, such as opening windows and propping open doors, if possible. You may be able to work with the vendor or owner of the recount space to increase total

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airflow supply to occupied spaces, if possible. This can be done by disabling or changing the settings of demand-control ventilation (DCV) controls that reduce air supply based on temperature or occupancy.

Because of the prolonged nature of the recount, county officials may also consider the use of UV sanitation lights and additional ventilation, such as fans, where practicable. Some of these additional efforts may help to combat accumulation of aerosol particles. However, care should be taken in regard to where these items are utilized. For example, additional fans would not be appropriate directed at a table of paper, election materials, but a portable UV light may be.

## **Setup Considerations**

The recount space should be set up so that there is adequate space between all participants and observers but allows for transparency and efficiency throughout the process. Signs, tape marks, or other visual cues such as decals or colored tape should be used on the floor, placed six feet apart, to keep the recount area organized and to ensure space between all parties when physical barriers are not possible.

Tabulators are required to work in pairs when hand counting ballots and candidate representatives have the ability to review (but not touch) ballots before they are tabulated. For those that must work closely together, it is recommended some physical barriers (e.g., plexiglass shields) are used to provide protection between participants. These barriers can be the tabletop shields that many municipal clerks used on election day at polling places or in their offices during in-person absentee voting. Counties can coordinate with their municipal clerks to borrow excess shields that can be used during the recount.

Tables used for the recount should be arranged in a way that ensures adequate distance between participants and observers. The number of people assigned to each table should also be limited. Arrange chairs in seating areas by turning, draping (covering chair with tape or fabric so seats cannot be used), spacing, or removing chairs to maintain social distancing. Identifying chairs that should not be used will be essential if rooms are used during the recount that have permanent seating, such as county board meeting rooms.

Designated candidate representatives should be able to review a ballot during the recount proceedings. This will require the implementation of a system for the representative to safely examine the ballot without violating social distancing standards. Clear tabletop barriers can be used for this purpose, but other methods may be used depending on the set up and needs of each recount site.

Additional observers, beyond the party representatives who need to be allowed access to see voting materials, may be asked to remain in an area designated by the county officials that accounts for social distancing. Current public health guidance is that a six-foot distance should be maintained meaning that non-party representative observers should expect that they will be asked to stay at least six feet from recount workers and other observers.

## **Screener Questions**

All individuals entering the recount facility or room should be screened to determine if they are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. Symptomatic individuals should not be allowed to participate in or observe the recount proceedings until they are free from symptoms. These questions were developed with the assistance of public health officials from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

1. Have you come in contact with a person known or suspected to have COVID-19?
2. Have you had a fever or chills in the last 24 hours?
3. Have you had a cough in the last 24 hours?
4. Have you had any shortness of breath or difficulty breathing in the last 24 hours?
5. Have you had any unexplained muscle or body aches in the last 24 hours?
6. Have you experienced a loss of taste or smell within the last 24 hours?
7. Have you had a sore throat within the last 24 hours?

If you answered “yes” to any of the seven questions, you should not participate in or observe at the recount today.

## **Face Coverings**

Face coverings should be required of all people inside the recount space to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among participants. Larger spaces and workstations that are spread out to account for social distancing will help minimize potential transmission of the virus but recount procedures still require tabulators and observers to be in close proximity to one another and face coverings should be required to increase the safety of all involved in the recount. The Executive Order requiring face coverings is still in effect while legal challenges to that order are settled by the courts and other counties may have local public health orders that also require face coverings. The Board of Canvassers conducting the recount should clearly communicate with those attending the recount about social distancing, face coverings and hand hygiene health guidance prior to the start of the recount to ensure all individuals participating are aware of the role they play in keeping the location safe. It is recommended that County Clerks have additional disposable face coverings available for tabulators and observers who do not have their own upon arrival at the recount facility.

## **Hand Hygiene and Surface Cleaning**

Strict hand hygiene and surface cleaning procedures should also be incorporated into the protocols at recount sites to minimize potential surface transmission of the virus. These procedures are familiar to election officials and have been recommended since the onset of the pandemic earlier this year. Participants and observers should be required to wash or sanitize their hands upon entry to the recount facility. In addition, tabulators should wash or sanitize their hands regularly throughout the day. If gloves are used, recount participants should take care when removing those gloves so as to not contaminate their bare hands in the process. After gloves have been removed, hands should be washed or sanitized to minimize the chance for COVID-19 transmission.

Surfaces such as tables and voting equipment should also be disinfected regularly throughout the day. Information on recommendations for election specific cleaning and disinfection are available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention webpage. In addition, approved cleaning procedures provided by your voting equipment vendor should be used to clean any voting equipment at regular intervals during the day. Best practices for cleaning different models of voting equipment can be found here: <https://elections.wi.gov/node/6723>.