



2021 Municipal By-election
COVID-19 Safety Plan



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This safety plan has been developed using Provincial Health Orders in effect as of January 26, 2021 and are subject to change.

Introduction

All government (local, regional, provincial, federal) functions or services, including those provided by agencies, crown corporations, contractors or service providers, and government owned or leased buildings are designated essential services. This includes services performed by election officials who work in voting places during a local government by-election.

The voting place (Second Floor - Pomeroy Sport Centre) is used by election officials and is a workplace that will be in operation for a total of three days: two advance voting days and general voting day and are open to the public to provide electoral services.

In addition to voting at the Pomeroy Sport Centre, there may be the ability to provide special voting opportunities to local senior apartments and care homes as well as the Fort St. John Hospital.

Critical to the City of Fort St. John's ability to administer a safe by-election during the current pandemic is this Safe Voting Places — COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures necessary to maintain business continuity while reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in these voting places. This safety plan is aligned with the WorkSafe BC requirement for employers to develop COVID-19 Safety Plans including the necessary policies to manage the workplace during the pandemic.

The City's COVID-19 safety plan includes workplace policies to address:

- A description of the minimum safety measures that must be in place in each respective voting place and how election officials can be kept safe in adjusted working conditions,
- who can be at the voting place, and,
- how to address illness that arises at the voting place.

This safety plan includes workplace protocols that minimize the impact of a potential positive case of COVID-19, and means that if the protocols are followed, the workplace does not need to be closed. These protocols ensure business continuity for the essential services provided in voting places during the administration of a by-election.

Voting places must be established and operate in accordance with current public health regulations. At a minimum, this means the following measures must be in place:

- Occupancy limits must be identified and enforced based on the ability to control risks in the workspace. Primary controls ensure there will be adequate physical distancing throughout the voting place with the installation of transparent barriers where physical distance is not possible.
- Election officials must sign a declaration of health to their supervisor each day based on symptom criteria set by the BC CDC. Election officials who have:
 - symptoms of COVID-19,
 - tested positive for COVID-19,
 - had recent close contacts with a COVID-19 positive person, or

Introduction (continued)

- returned from travel outside of Canada within the previous 14 days, must not attend the workplace.
- Appropriate signage (supplied by the City) must be placed at the entryway informing election officials and visitors of the occupancy load and that entry is prohibited if a person is showing symptoms of COVID-19. Additional signage should be placed as necessary in common work areas.
- Physical distancing of 2 metres (6 feet) between individuals in the voting place is required and must be marked out in the voting place and in queuing areas outside.
- Each registration table will be set up with a transparent barrier to protect both election officials and voters. Election officials are required to wear masks and will be provided with rubber gloves if they wish to use them. Election officials working in the public access space are required to wear masks when not working behind a barrier (while the public is present).
- Hand sanitizer is available for use by voters and election officials. Voters will be asked to sanitize their hands upon entry and exit, and election officials will sanitize their hands regularly throughout the workday.

Risk Identification

Risks for the transmission of COVID-19 in traditional voting places include the following:

- Direct transmission via respiratory droplets in the air between:
 - voters standing in line,
 - voters and the election officials who are serving them,
 - election officials working at the same station as each other,
 - scrutineers and election officials at the same station.
- Indirect transmission via respiratory droplets that have landed on high touch points, including:
 - door handles,
 - voting books signed by hundreds of voters throughout the day,
 - ballots and other election materials passed between voters and election officials such as additional forms,
 - ballot marking pens and voting booth surfaces where voters mark ballots, and
 - touch fixtures and horizontal surfaces in washrooms.

The risk mitigation protocols set out below either modify procedures to eliminate the risk scenarios, or mitigate the risk of transmission through a hierarchy of protections.

Risk Mitigation Protocols

This safety plan uses the hierarchy of protections recommended by the BC government and WorkSafeBC. This hierarchy prioritizes:

- a first level of contact elimination/physical distancing, followed by
- engineering controls,
- administrative controls and
- personal protective equipment,

as a means of identifying which adaptations are necessary for reducing COVID-19 transmission hazards. Cleaning and hygiene practices to reduce transmission risk are also set out.

First Level Protection (elimination/substitution)

Limit the number of people at the workplace and ensure physical distance wherever possible

Voting places perform functions that require election officials to be present in the voting place and that the voting place be open to the public. Because voting is a constitutional right, the number of individuals voting locally cannot be reduced. Rather, the City's first-level protections for voting places focus on reducing the number of individuals in a voting place at any given time by providing alternative ways to vote, and by streamlining processes. First-level protections also include measures to facilitate physical distancing in the voting place.

The City's first-level protections are as follows:

- qualifications for mail-in voting has been increased and allows all voters the ability to utilize this option rather than visiting the voting place. A public information campaign to inform voters will be developed.
- curbside voting has always been an option and increased public information about accessing this option will be provided. Curbside voting allows a voter to remain in his/her vehicle with an election official going to the vehicle to complete the registration process. The voter would fill the ballot out in the vehicle and return it to the official for placement in the voting machine. This would reduce the number of voters entering the voting place. The Chief Election Officer, Deputy Chief Election Officer and Presiding Election Officials will be the only personnel authorized to conduct this type of voting. A separate safe work procedure will be distributed to these staff members.
- The number of advance voting opportunities will remain the same which allows voters the ability to utilize this option rather than voting on general voting day.
- Voting place selection criteria prioritizes locations with high occupancy limits, to maximize the amount of space within a voting place. High-ceilings (i.e., large volumes) and separate access/egress points are also a priority.
- Voting place occupancy limits are calculated on a location-by-location basis. Voters may occupy unencumbered spaces at a rate of one voter per 36 square feet. Voters in excess of the occupancy limits are required to line up outside.

Risk Mitigation Protocols

First Level Protection (elimination/substitution) (continued)

Limit the number of people at the workplace and ensure physical distance wherever possible

The City's first-level protections are as follows:

- The voter registration process remains the same: registration and ballot distribution can be completed by one election official. Oral declarations have been approved by Ministerial Order which allows the election official to fill out the voter's book and confirm identity by the voter providing two pieces of identification to the election official. The elector is not required to sign the voting book.
- The special voting opportunity forms will also be filled out by election staff.
- Each election official will have their own pen and voting book to reduce high touch points. Election officials will not be allowed to use another election official's voting book or pen to register electors.
- Candidate representatives will be limited to observing voting processes from a designated area and may not move freely within the voting place. The number of candidate scrutineers that may be present is limited based on space availability and are limited to one scrutineer per candidate.
- 2 metre (6 foot) physical distancing markings are set out on the voting place floor using tape, and there will be two greeters (entrance and exit) assigned to assist with directing electors to registration tables, reminding them of the mask requirement to enter the building and will enforce physical distancing.

Second Level Protection (Engineering Controls) **Barriers and Partitions**

The City's second-level protections are as follows:

- After prioritizing physical space, voting place selection criteria prioritize locations with HVAC systems that maximize fresh air intake/exhaust of inside air. Sites with doors and windows that can be opened to ventilate the voting space are also prioritized. The Pomeroy Sport Centre is a large complex that is minimally used at this time. The amount of time spent at each special voting location is a maximum of two hours with the spaces being well ventilated.
- Transparent barriers are installed on the top of voter registration tables. The barriers are designed to separate the breathing zones of a standing voter and sitting election official.
- Election officials will provide a ballot and a single-use pen to each voter through a pass-through gap in the bottom of the barrier.
- The transparent barriers utilized are self-standing, portable units that do not introduce new risks to the workplace.
- There will be an election official at the voting booth area to retrieve each pen after use and these will be sanitized and distributed amongst each of the voter registration desks.

Risk Mitigation Protocols

Second Level Protection (Engineering Controls) (continued) **Barriers and Partitions**

The City's second-level protections are as follows:

- There is a staff only section that will be segregated away from the voting area with pipe and drape. This is an area for staff to take breaks and eat meals. The 2 metre (6 foot) required physical distancing will be adhered to by placing chairs in marked positions that are identified on the floor.

Third Level Protection (Administrative Controls) **Rules and Guidelines**

In addition to the rules and guidelines that the City has adjusted to allow for first-level protections (lower occupancy and physical distancing), rules are in place to prevent infected individuals from entering the voting place, and to reduce the contact intensity of interactions within the voting place, the City's third-level protections are as follows:

- Election officials must complete a declaration of health to their supervisor each day based on symptom criteria set by the BC CDC.
- Election officials and voters who:
 - are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19,
 - have tested positive for COVID-19, .
 - have had recent close contacts with a COVID-19 positive person, or
 - have returned from travel outside of Canada within the past 14 daysare not permitted to enter the voting place. Other voting arrangements will be available to these individuals.
- Signage will be in place reminding voters of occupancy limits, distancing requirements, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene requirements.
- Voters are invited to use their own pen to mark their ballot. Single-use pencils are provided to voters by the voting officer as needed.
- Voters retain the ability to insert their ballot into the voting machine.
- Election officials responsible for the mail ballots are still required to handle the ballot and associated documentation after it is handled by the voter and will therefore sanitize their hands more frequently during this part of the process or wear disposable gloves that will be provided.
- Washrooms will be reserved for election official use; alcohol-based hand sanitizer will be available for voters.
- Shared dishes and utensils must not be used. Drinks and individual meals will be supplied.

Risk Mitigation Protocols

Fourth Level Protection Personal Protective Equipment

The City's fourth-level protections are as follows:

- Election officials whose stations are behind barriers are required to wear masks while working in the voting place.
- There will be one designated voting registration table behind barriers with the election official being able to remove his/her mask temporarily to assist voters (e.g., for voters who read lips in order to communicate or are hard of hearing).
- Election officials whose stations are not behind barriers are required to wear masks while working in the voting place. Election officials not behind barriers may remove their facemasks temporarily to assist voters only if 2-metre (6 foot) distancing can be maintained throughout the interaction.
- Elections officials must wear masks during in-person training.
- Candidate representatives must wear masks while observing the conduct of voting in voting places.
- Voters must wear a mask when they come into the voting place and will not be asked to remove their masks while registering to vote. Disposable masks will be available for voters if they do not have a mask with them.
- Gloves will be available in the voting place for election officials who choose to use them for certain tasks (e.g. counting ballots, sanitization routines).

Cleaning and Hygiene Practices

The City's cleaning and hygiene practices are as follows:

- Voting place surfaces are cleaned before the voting place opens to the public.
- Hand sanitizer pump bottles are available at the voting place entrance and exit, and at each voter registration table. Voters are asked to sanitize their hands upon entering and before leaving.
- Election officials are instructed to sanitize their hands each hour throughout the day. Hand sanitizer will be available at each voter registration table, at the voting machines, and entrance/exit doors.
- The designated election official manning the exit door will be instructed to clean high touch points in the voting area each hour throughout the day using the cleaning supplies provided. The cleaning supplies will consist of either Lysol wipes or disinfecting spray with paper towel.
- Pens are collected as voters leave the voting place and will be sanitized before reuse.
- Voting place surfaces are cleaned after voting and counting have concluded.
- After eating a meal or taking a break in the staff only area, each election official will be required to sanitize the area where they sat.

Training Plan

Election staff will be comprised of experienced personnel that have worked one or more voting opportunity. This experience will be extremely beneficial since the basic election training can be a brief refresher with the majority of the training focused on this safety plan.

The Election Official Training Manual will be updated to include information on COVID-19, how it is transmitted, and the risk mitigation protocols set out above to ensure that election officials are aware of how to administer voting safely within the voting place.

The election officials training session will take place at the voting place, the second floor of the Pomeroy Sport Centre, so that all staff can visually see the space and be provided with an explanation as to the increased safety measures in place for this by-election.