

Message from the Executive

We know that this is a difficult time, and we are all adapting to the shifting restrictions across our Province throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The Executive has met with representatives from Municipal Affairs and Alberta Health to ensure that there is clarity amongst Returning Officers across the Province as we proceed with the delivery of the 2021 Municipal Election. Below you will find the Q&A document prepared summarizing our discussion.

You can expect to see and hear clarity of messaging based on the below by the Ministry of Health and/or the Ministry of Municipal Affairs to ensure that the public is aware of certain restrictions for the upcoming election, such as the fact that there is no way to offer voting to those in legal isolation (whether they've tested positive for COVID19 or are symptomatic). The situation remains fluid, and Returning Officers are encouraged to monitor alberta.ca and the Municipal Affairs FAQ documents that are distributed to chief administrative officers that address emerging questions related to municipal impacts on the COVID-19 response.

As always, we are committed to sharing information with you all as it becomes available.

Lastly, remember why you chose to be involved in Municipal Elections and public service overall, believe in yourself just a little more – you'd be surprised what your colleagues and your communities see in you. Your dedication does not go unnoticed.

Q&A Summary – Wednesday, September 22, 2021

Meeting between AMCA Executive, Municipal Affairs and Alberta Health Services

Q: Are all election workers required to show proof of vaccination, or a negative test result before working any advance poll or on election day?

A: Municipalities may choose to pass a bylaw mandating this; however, it is not required by Municipal Affairs or Alberta Health.

Q: Are voters required to show proof of vaccination, or a negative test result before voting during an advance poll or on election day?

A: No. See below for further clarity surrounding the Restrictions Exemption Program.

Q: What happens if the polling station venue has applied for the Restrictions Exemption Program?

A: The Restrictions Exemption Program does not apply for elections. The Executive recommended to the Ministries that clarity surrounding this message be shared to recreation facilities as well as the general public.

Q: Are masks required at all polling stations, for both election officials and voters?

A: Yes; the current Public Health Order mandates that masks be worn in all public indoor spaces including polling stations.

Q: What authority does the Returning Officer have to deny someone access to vote if masking is required?

A: Alberta Health and Municipal Affairs advises that Returning Officers must issue a ballot to voters (regardless of if they are wearing mask) if they are eligible voters. It is important to note that as Returning Officers we cannot deny eligible voters the opportunity to receive a ballot in this case.

Considerations that Returning Officers may implement include ensuring physical distancing of staff and other voters for those voters not wearing a mask and regular cleaning of surfaces.

As well, in advance of advances/election day consider notifying both the local AHS inspector for the area as well as law enforcement of the locations of polling stations in the event a Returning Officer does require to make a call with respect to serious or unsafe situations arising at the polling station(s).

Please remember it is not the Returning Officer's responsibility to ask for proof of masking exemption, this could be requested by law enforcement.

Q: How does the 1/3 fire code capacity rule apply to polling stations?

A: The 1/3 fire code capacity for indoor gatherings does apply to all polling stations. By promoting the required 2m separation between all persons in the polling station, that naturally will create the decreased capacity in your polling station. Returning Officers are encouraged to plan for physically distanced lines out of the polling station.

Q: Are Returning Officers required to complete contact tracing for polling stations, and track all voters/staff in the event of a positive case identified following the election?

A: No – there is no requirement by AHS to require contact tracing for polling stations.

Q: Is there an opportunity or an obligation for symptomatic voters or voters in isolation the opportunity to vote? If so, how?

A: There is no opportunity for symptomatic voters and/or voters in isolation to vote.

Returning Officers should consider communicating to the public to vote in advance voting stations (if applicable to the Municipality) when they are healthy, to ensure they are afforded the ability to vote.

Alberta Health is reviewing the language contained in the September 2021 version of *Guidance for Elections* document for clarification of voting methods and will be updated as soon as possible.

AMCA Executive strongly encouraged both Ministries to provide this clarity to the public across Alberta and to not rely on the messaging of individual Returning Officers.

Q: Will Municipalities be given the ability to expand the provisions for special ballots? Current legislation wording does not allow illness or COVID isolation as a valid reason to request a special ballot.

A: Municipal Affairs confirmed that there are no changes to the legislation with respect to the provisions for Special Ballots.

Returning Officers are reminded that it is not their obligation to confirm the validity of the Special Ballot application.

Q: Elector Assistance at Home is not included as an allowable reason to enter a private residence under the new public health order. Can we enter homes to provide elector assistance at home?

A: Yes, Elector Assistance at Home is allowable under the provision of providing a 'service' so long as the voting service is not being provided to a symptomatic or COVID-19 positive voter.

Q: Can you confirm that physical distancing exception (4.5 of the Order) applies to the election, as a service that cannot be received while maintaining physical distance of two metres.

A: Physical distancing is to be maintained at all polling stations except for short periods of time when passing a ballot, depositing a ballot into a ballot box, etc...

Returning Officers are reminded to ensure the appropriate distancing between election worker stations, voter line ups, etc. throughout each day of voting.

Q: Aside from the usual protocols: masking, physical distancing, hand sanitization, heightened cleaning of surfaces and barriers, are there other recommendations for managing polling stations?

A: Returning Officers may consider a similar approach to the Federal Election whereby voters were able to use their own pencil/pen or take home their writing tool provided at the voting station. The importance of masks, hand sanitization, and sanitization of touch points throughout the polling stations was stressed as the best ways to mitigate risk.

Q: Has there been discussion on postponing the election? If a municipality has an outbreak in their community, can the municipality postpone/request to postpone their own election?

A: Both Ministries have indicated that there have been no discussions on postponing the 2021 Municipal Election.

Q: Are municipalities able to apply for an exemption from the CMOH to the new order and will responses be expedited?

A: Elections are not eligible for the Restrictions Exemption Program. Additionally, physical distancing and capacity limit exemptions cannot be applied for, for voting.

Q: With the difficulty of physical distancing in smaller polling stations, do scrutineers have to be permitted if you cannot provide adequate spacing/distancing?

A: Municipal Affairs will review this scenario further; however, presently, physical distancing is to be maintained at all times in this scenario. Returning Officers should consider removing one of the voting booths to allow for more physical distancing if scrutineers attend a polling station. It is recommended that Returning Officers review the polling station layout to find a location to place a chair(s) 2m from other persons in the event you have a scrutineer attend.

Q: How do Returning Officers address the requirement to lock the polling station doors at the close of polls on Election night (prescribed in the legislation)?

A: Alberta Health recommends that the line be kept outside the polling station (if applicable) with an election worker standing at the end of the line at the close of polls, allowing the proper physical distancing between voters and the 1/3 capacity measure be upheld.

Municipal Affairs will review this legislatively and provide clarity surrounding this legislated requirement.