

FAQ – Health, hygiene and polling in the COVID-19 environment

Important notice to all AEC employees:

The AEC is unable to provide advice on personal circumstances or medical conditions in relation to COVID-19. For these questions, please contact a medical professional or review the resources below:

- [Australian Government Department of Health](#)
- National Coronavirus Health Information Line:
1800 044 599 (operating 24 hours per day, 7 days per week)
- [NSW Government Department of Health Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Your state or territory public health agency.](#)

The COVIDSafe app helps state and territory health officials to quickly contact people who may have been exposed to coronavirus.

Downloading and using the COVIDSafe app is completely voluntary, but we strongly encourage all our workers to consider the positive individual step they can take by downloading the app on your personal phones.

General

If I feel unwell should I still come to work?

No. If you feel unwell you should remain home and advise your OIC or supervisor. If you are displaying COVID-19 symptoms **do not** attend an AEC workplace. Contact your manager or supervisor immediately and seek medical advice as appropriate.

I am in a high risk group for COVID-19. Can I work at a polling place or an out-posted centre (OPC) during the election?

Yes. Community transmission remains low, however, roles which involve face to face exposure increase the risk of contracting COVID-19. Anyone concerned about their level of risk should seek advice from a medical practitioner prior to accepting an offer of employment.

Will I receive training in the new processes put in place to prevent COVID-19 transmission?

All AEC training and reference information has been updated to include details of the AEC's approach to preventing the transmission of COVID-19. Teams at AEC work sites will undertake an onsite briefing upon commencement to cover requirements for that location.

What are my responsibilities in minimising transmission of COVID-19 in an AEC workplace?

All AEC workers have some key responsibilities:

- If you feel unwell do not come to work – stay home, self-isolate and seek medical advice.
- Strict hand hygiene – washing hands regularly and thoroughly, and regular use of hand sanitiser as required.
- Maintain physical distancing of 1.5m whilst working and during breaks.
- Leave personal items such as mobile phones in the box provided to you.
- Do not share your identification equipment – vest, badge and lanyard.
- Follow the directions of the Divisional Returning Officer (DRO), OIC or Supervisor in relation to health and hygiene processes in your workplace.

If I start feeling unwell while working at an AEC workplace what should I do?

Advise your supervisor immediately. If you are experiencing [symptoms of COVID-19](#), go home, self-isolate and seek medical advice as appropriate.

How will safe voting services be provided to high risk locations such as nursing homes and hospitals?

Due to heightened risks in these locations, the AEC will not be conducting onsite polling at nursing homes and hospitals for this event. All residents and patients will have the opportunity to lodge a postal vote.

How will working at the election affect my Jobseeker payment?

Payment for work with the AEC is considered taxable income. Please refer to Services Australia's site: [How to report and Manage your payment](#).

How will working at the election affect my JobKeeper payment?

Payment for work with the AEC is considered taxable income. Please refer to the Australian Taxation Offices' site: [JobKeeper – Employee frequently asked questions](#).

Polling Place

How will the AEC maintain hygiene and social distancing in polling places?

Based on advice from the Department of Health, the AEC has committed to the following standards:

Maximum numbers within polling places

The number of voters permitted within polling places will be limited according to the size of the area within the venue which is used for polling. The current restriction of 1 person per 4 square metres will be applied, and will include the number of staff. A Queue Controller will ensure that the number of people inside the polling place at any one time does not exceed the maximum limit.

Physical distancing

The AEC will ensure the requirement of a distance of 1.5m between individuals is maintained where possible by implementing the following:

- Queuing areas will be marked out for appropriate distance.
- Spacing between voting screens.
- Minimum required distance between issuing points.
- Minimum distancing between staff during post-polling counts.
- Signs and instructions will be provided, including training.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Polling staff will be provided with surgical masks, noting it is a requirement for staff to be trained in the correct use and disposal of all PPE. Non-latex gloves will be available where requested noting full hand hygiene must still be followed particularly before and after breaks. All PPE must be disposed of in a bio-waste bin upon removal.

Hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is a vital component to safe operation of polling places. Hand sanitiser will be provided and promoted at key locations:

- At entry to the polling place
- At every issuing point for ordinary and declaration votes
- At the exit from the polling place
- In staff break areas

Signs will be provided to instruct on correct use of sanitiser by staff and voters.

Hard surface cleaning

Issuing points for ordinary votes will be sanitised every 10 voters including the voter's side of the table and the protective screen. Tables used by voters at declaration issuing points will be sanitised after every voter, and the declaration area (including screens) will be sanitised every 10 minutes.

Issuing points will also be sanitised when there is a changeover of staff, including the electronic certified list and the moulded plastic ballot box at declaration issuing points. Voting screens will be sanitised by the Hygiene Officer every 10 minutes with sanitising spray. The Hygiene Officer will also ensure that the available voting screens are rotated throughout the day and replace voting screens where they have become degraded.

Protective screens at issuing points

Light weight protective screens will be placed at each issuing point where possible.

Pencils

AEC is encouraging voters to bring their own pen or pencil for completing their ballot papers. Pencils will be issued to voters who require them at the issuing point, and the pencils can be kept by the voter or placed in the bin as they exit the polling place.

Identification - badges, lanyards and bibs

Every temporary election worker is required to wear a colour-coded bib and a badge attached to a lanyard to identify their role. These items will not be shared. Each worker will be allocated a box in which to place their personal items and their identification gear.

Waste disposal

Every polling place and AEC site will be provided with a bio-waste bin and the supervisors will be trained in required procedures.

Cleaning

Every premises used for polling will be cleaned prior to use as part of the hire contract.

Touch point cleaning will occur prior to opening the polling place, throughout each day of polling, and after polling has closed each day, by a designated staff member.

Once polling is completed and materials and equipment are removed, the AEC will arrange a deep clean via a contractor prior to handing back that facility.

Do I need to provide my own PPE or hygiene equipment on polling day?

Your polling place will have a stock of suitable gloves and masks for use. Hand sanitiser and hand wash will be available at every polling place. Sanitising materials will also be provided for the polling place.

How will queues be safely managed in polling places?

Due to the additional health requirements, there may be delays in the voting process and queues may be longer. Markers will be used to indicate the required 1.5m distance within the main queue outside and a security guard will supervise this queue. Queue Controllers inside will direct voters to a vacant issuing point or marked waiting point and manage the overall number of people in the premises.

Can COVID-19 be transmitted from ballot papers, envelopes or posted items?

Evidence from the Department of Health indicates there is some risk for up to 24 hours after handling. Mail that was posted more than 48 hours ago does not pose a risk. AEC has introduced procedures to minimise this risk in polling places, counting teams and mail rooms.

What should I do as an OIC if a staff member attends work and has flu-like symptoms?

Workers who are unwell should stay home, self-isolate and seek medical attention. Instruct your worker to go home and contact your DRO to advise of the reduction in staff. Where possible, you will be provided with a replacement staff member.

There is a voter who is clearly unwell (coughing and sneezing) – As OIC, what can I do?

If someone seems ill check if they are feeling ok first – do not make assumptions. Encourage the voter to leave and seek medical assistance and offer them a mask. If this occurs during early voting, the elector can apply for a postal vote online. On polling day, record their details on an Elector Information Report (EF016) so they do not receive a non-voter notice.

Direct the hygiene officer to sanitise any touch points the voters may have been in contact with.

A voter has become very angry, yelling at a staff member or another voter and threatened to spit on them. What should I do?

The OIC procedures handbook provides direction for dealing with difficult behaviours. The OIC is authorised to remove a person from the polling place or request the police to do so, should their behaviour threaten safe delivery of polling.

Remain calm when speaking to the person. If possible record their details along with the incident details in your OIC Return. Contact your DRO immediately.

One of the issuing tables has been sneezed on and there are visible droplets on the table and the protective screen. How do I address this?

Direct the issuing officer to leave the issuing point and wash their hands. Direct the hygiene officer to sanitise all hard surfaces and the ECL while the issuing officer is absent. Should the top ballot paper be contaminated, it must be placed in a spoilt ballot paper envelope immediately.

A voter has sneezed or coughed on a staff member. What should I do?

Immediately direct the staff member to thoroughly wash the part of their body which has been affected with soap and lots of running water. If the droplets have landed on a body part which has fluid (eyes, mouth or open wound) thoroughly wash the affected area with cold water. The staff member should go home and seek medical advice.

Direct the voter to wear a mask in order to complete voting. If they refuse, the OIC is authorised to remove a person from the polling place or request the police to do so, should their behaviour threaten safe delivery of polling.

Contact your DRO as soon as possible. Record the staff member and voter details as part of an incident report in your OIC Return.

A family has arrived together and want to go to the same issuing point as a group. Is this permitted?

A family group will be expected to queue separately once inside the polling place. Groups should not be encouraged to approach an issuing point together unless a voter requires assistance. Voters bringing children can stay with the adult but will count towards the total number of people inside the polling place.

Queueing time outside the polling place has reached 25 minutes. How can I respond to complaints from electors who are waiting?

Due to public health measures in the polling place, the voting process and queues may be longer than in previous events. When interacting with frustrated voters, remain calm and inform them of the public health measures in place to help protect the community.

Role Responsibilities

I am a Polling Assistant, issuing ordinary ballot papers to the public. How has my role changed to account for COVID-19 risks?

A Polling Assistant may move between issuing officer, queue controller, hygiene officer and ballot box guard roles during the day. Your OIC will explain the key health points for each role. Issuing officers will work behind a protective screen, the voting and issuing areas will be sanitised regularly and single use pencils provided.

Every staff member is expected to wash their hands before and after breaks, and sanitise their hands throughout the day. Information on hygiene processes introduced to polling places will be provided as part of your training.

I am a Declaration Vote Officer, issuing declaration votes to the public. How has my role changed to account for COVID-19 risks?

Strict hand hygiene will be required at all issuing points. Issuing officers will work behind a protective screen, the voting and issuing areas will be sanitised regularly and single use pencils provided.

Every staff member is expected to wash their hands before and after breaks, and sanitise their hands throughout the day. Information on hygiene processes introduced to polling places will be provided as part of your training.

I am a Ballot Box Guard in a polling place. How has my role changed to account for COVID-19 risks?

Ballot Box guards will need to request voters to sanitise their hand prior to exiting the polling place. You will still be able to assist a voter if they require assistance putting their ballot in the ballot box, however, you will be required to sanitise your hands immediately afterwards.

I am an Inquiry Officer in a polling place, assisting voters with questions about how to complete their ballot paper formally. How am I protected while working near the voting screens?

Inquiry Officers move about the polling place, providing one-on-one assistance to voters. The Department of Health advises that short term proximity is unlikely to increase the risk of infection as long as good hand hygiene is practiced. Inquiry Officers will wear masks provided by the OIC while assisting voters and must use hand sanitiser between interactions. If wearing gloves, hand sanitiser must still be applied as regularly.

Information on hygiene processes introduced to polling places will be provided as part of your training.

I am an Officer in Charge (OIC) for a polling place. How has my role changed to account for COVID-19 risks?

As OIC you will be responsible for monitoring the hygiene measures in your polling place and have an additional staff member to act as a Hygiene Officer. You will be provided with clear instructions, training and reference materials, and the necessary equipment. Your preparation, set up and

delivery checklists in the Election Procedures Handbook and the OIC Return will remind you of key activities to be organised.

You should also be mindful of your own hand hygiene and physical distance as you move about the polling place and undertake your duties. As you are not static at an issuing point, this is particularly important.

I am a Polling Place Liaison Officer (PPLO). How has my role changed to account for COVID-19 risks?

Your role now includes a check on hygiene processes and equipment in polling places. Your training and reference materials has been updated to reflect this. You will carry spare PPE and hygiene supplies in case of excess demand.

As you are moving around all day, it is particularly important to be mindful of your own hand hygiene and physical distancing when providing support to your polling places. When you arrive at each assigned polling place you must follow the directions of the queue controller who is monitoring the total numbers inside. Ensure you maintain a physical distance of 1.5 m when reviewing issuing points and minimize the number of things you touch within each polling place.

Out-posted Centre (OPC)

How will AEC maintain hygiene and social distancing in OPCs?

All OPCs will have detailed procedures in place to maintain hygiene and physical distance. The Facility Manager and Divisional Returning Officer (DRO) will be supported by a Work Health Safety (WHS) Officer to implement the agreed procedures to ensure a safe working environment.

I am a Supervisor for a scrutiny team post-election. Are there additional considerations due to COVID-19 for my team?

You must ensure that your team is following appropriate physical distancing and hand hygiene procedures. You will receive training and reference materials to help you understand and meet these obligations.

If a member of your team is displaying flu-like symptoms, speak to your DRO immediately who will discuss with the team member whether they should go home, self-isolate and seek medical advice.

Scrutineers usually stand right behind count staff during ballot paper scrutiny. How will this change under current restrictions?

Protective screens will be used to separate scrutineers from staff sorting and counting votes. Scrutineers will be provided with training and a briefing on social distancing and hygiene in their role.

Use of face masks is required by count staff and scrutineers. Separated sorting and count tables will allow for distancing of count staff and will be set up with staff on one side, to allow scrutineers to observe from 1.5m away on the opposite side.

I am working at the OPC, handling postal vote envelopes. How can I reduce risk of contamination from the envelopes?

The Department of Health advises that the risk of COVID-19 virus being live on a posted envelope is low. Strict hand hygiene, regular cleaning of ballot boxes, hard surfaces and IT equipment will minimise the risk further. Your supervisor will direct you on requirements.

Can I bring my own food to the OPC?

Yes. OPC workers will have access to secure storage for a small number of personal items. Fridges and microwaves will be available for storing and preparing your own lunch. Please note, due to hygiene restrictions, no shared food such as morning tea will be permitted.

Will tea and coffee be provided at the OPC?

No. Due to hygiene restriction we cannot permit the sharing of food or drink, or sharing of crockery and cutlery. Please bring your own cutlery and crockery as required including your own mug/cup.

Drinking water will also be available, please provide your own bottle or cup.

Managers / DROs

Important notice for people managers:

Ensure that employees are aware, the AEC is unable to provide advice on personal circumstances or medical conditions in relation to COVID-19. For these questions, please refer staff to their medical professional or to the resources below:

- [Australian Government Department of Health](#)
- National Coronavirus Health Information Line:
1800 044 599 (operating 24 hours per day, 7 days per week)
- [NSW Government Department of Health Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Your state or territory public health agency.](#)

An OIC has called to advise a worker attended with flu-like symptoms and has been sent home. What should I do?

Ensure any staff who may have come in contact with the worker have wash their hands thoroughly. Direct the hygiene officer to undertake touch point cleaning in locations the worker may have touched. The DRO can deploy contingency staff to replace the worker if available, as in any other absentee situation. Annotate the worker's record in AEC Employment and ensure payment is not made.

What additional hygiene and safety procedures are required within the Divisional Office or Larger Working Unit (LWU)?

Hand sanitiser stations will be placed at regular intervals around the office. PPE such as masks and gloves will be available for staff use and regular touch point cleaning will occur. Deep cleaning of the office area has been arranged.

How many admin staff can I have in my Divisional Office and OPC?

The current standards 1 person per 4 square metres. Staff must have 1.5m between workspaces. If this does not meet requirements, consider introducing shifts to reduce the number of staff in the office at the same time.

Consider staggering lunch breaks to reduce the number of staff in the lunch room at one time. Where lockers are provided at the OPC, consider staggering start and finish times to reduce crowding in confined spaces.

What additional procedures do I need to have in place in my mailroom?

In accordance with the Mail Handling Policy, gloves and/or a surgical mask can be worn when processing mail, however it is sufficient for staff to work with strict hand hygiene alone. Washing hands thoroughly before and after the process, and use of hand sanitiser before, during and after is required.

What additional procedures should I put in place for processing postal vote applications and postal votes?

Strict hand hygiene is sufficient. PPE is available for use if required.

Will the nominations/declaration ceremony change?

Nominations are by appointment only. Hand sanitiser will be made available on entry and must be used when handling forms. Passing of forms between people to be kept to a minimum and social distancing of 1.5m will be implemented and the current restriction of 1 person per 4 square metres will be applied at all times. An EFTPOS machine is available for contactless payment.

Additional hygiene measures such as washing hands and using hand sanitiser must occur if handling cash.

Do my Return of Materials (RoM) team need to wear gloves when handling packages returned from polling places?

The RoM team can choose to wear gloves, however advice from Department of Health supports strict hand hygiene as being the most effective method of avoiding infection. All packages will be sprayed on arrival with sanitiser. The OPC / hub will have stocks of sanitising spray, hand sanitiser and hand soap for the use of staff.