

# Voting Amid COVID-19:

## Your Guide to Safer Voting During the Coronavirus Pandemic



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## The Coronavirus Isn't Letting Up, and Neither Can We

The first half of 2020 took us all by surprise. It's been a season of change and unprecedented challenges. While the future seems uncertain, we need to keep pushing forward together.

Voting is an essential part of a functioning democracy. Although voting may look very different in 2020 than in past presidential elections, we can work together to ensure that voters can safely cast their ballots while limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Our communities have made tremendous efforts to adapt, and we are confident that applying the same health precautions to our voting efforts will make a difference. We've created this book to provide guidance on precautions you can take to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community from further spread while exercising your right to vote.

Voting in the middle of a pandemic will be unlike anything we've experienced in the past century. By understanding your rights and being prepared ahead of time, you can ensure your voice is heard.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tomislav Mihaljevic".

Tomislav Mihaljevic, MD  
Chief Executive Officer & President  
Cleveland Clinic



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Grumet".

Jason Grumet  
President  
Bipartisan Policy Center

*The response to the COVID-19 pandemic is continuously evolving as we learn more about the virus and the best techniques to address the associated risks. These materials are based on currently available data and guidelines from the CDC and other resources as of September 24, 2020. This guidance may change from time to time and should be used only as a general reference.*

*Please visit [clevelandclinic.org/Covid19atwork](https://clevelandclinic.org/Covid19atwork) for the latest updates or to request additional information.*

# For Voters

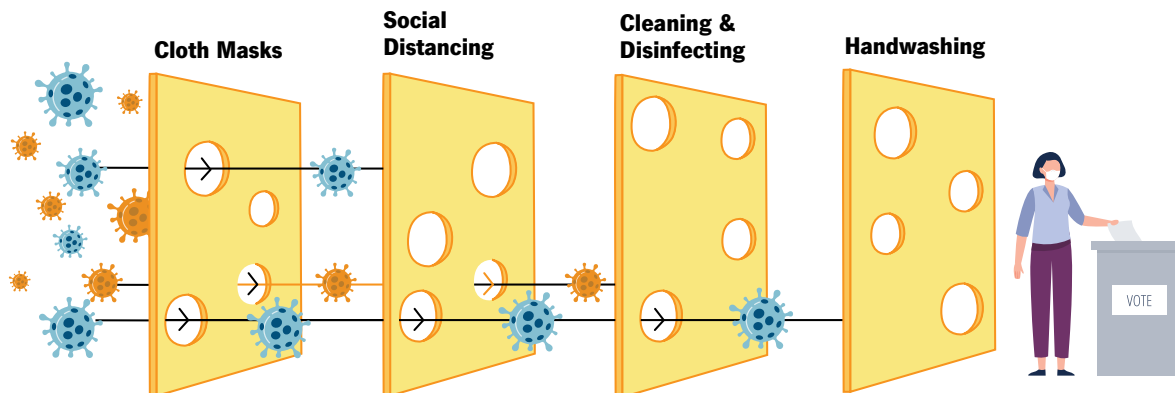
# Voting Amid COVID-19



## Layers of Safety

This guide shares ways to keep you safer in a pandemic. No single step is effective on its own, but they add layers of protection when used together.

One way to look at safety precautions is the **“Swiss Cheese Model”** from James Reason, PhD. In the model, there are risks in any setting. Most of the time these events never happen. Safety shields are in place to help prevent them. When a safety step is used alone, it leaves holes like a slice of Swiss cheese. Using the safety shields together helps block these holes.



We need multiple layers of safety precautions to help us stay healthy in the time of coronavirus. Some of these safety shields are:

- › Covering your face can slow the spread of the virus.
- › Keeping 6 feet from other people in public.
- › Cleaning and disinfecting your home.
- › Washing your hands.

No single effort is perfect. When combined, they can help control the spread of coronavirus.

## General Recommendations

The best ways to help protect yourself, your loved ones and your community from COVID-19:



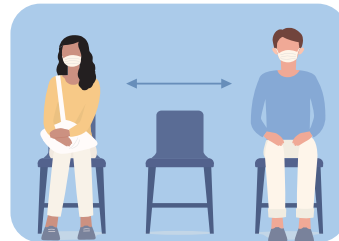
### Wear a face mask:

Help protect yourself and others with a face mask, covering or shield in public, particularly where it's difficult to maintain a 6-foot distance from others. Try to avoid touching your face.



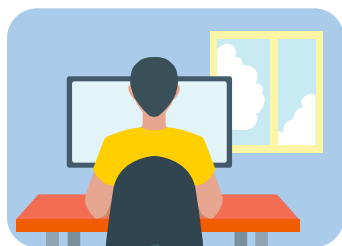
### Cover your mouth and nose:

When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve, rather than your hands. Properly dispose of your tissue in a trash can and then wash your hands.



### Practice physical distancing:

Maintain a 6-foot distance from others.



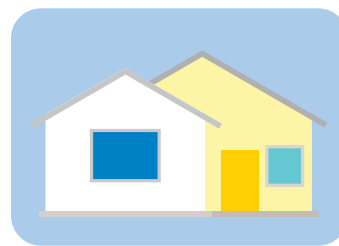
### Follow social distancing guidelines:

Avoid group gatherings and crowded places.



### Wash your hands:

Reduce the spread of disease-causing germs by washing your hands often. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.



### Stay home when sick:

Avoid leaving home if you are sick. If you want or need to connect with your healthcare providers, first do so by phone or through virtual visits.



### Clean and disinfect:

Use a virus-killing disinfectant on frequently touched surfaces.



### Avoid care facilities:

Do not visit nursing homes, long-term care facilities or retirement communities, unless you are providing critical assistance.



### Maintain healthy habits:

Get enough sleep, eat healthy foods, drink plenty of water and exercise, if you are able, to help support your immune health.

## Know the Symptoms

It is important to be educated about the symptoms of COVID-19. These resources will help you recognize the symptoms.

### What Symptoms Should I Be Watching For?

Patients with confirmed infection with COVID-19 reported these symptoms:



Fever.



Chills.



Cough.



Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.



Diarrhea.



Nausea or vomiting.



Muscle or body aches.



Congestion or runny nose.



Headache.



Fatigue.



New loss of taste or smell.



Sore throat.

This list does not include all possible symptoms. Children have similar symptoms to adults and generally have mild illness.

Symptoms can range in severity from very mild to severe. In about 80% of patients, COVID-19 causes only mild symptoms. For an up-to-date list of symptoms, please consult the CDC's website.

Some jurisdictions made voting accommodations for vulnerable people, including those with COVID-19 symptoms.

Please visit <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/policy-area/elections/> to learn about curbside voting and other options that may be available to you.

Please visit [clevelandclinic.org](https://clevelandclinic.org) for more information. Our healthcare providers are [online](#) and ready to help. If you need immediate medical attention, please call 911.

## Face Covering

### Face masks

As the coronavirus pandemic stretches on with a second wave of cases following the re-opening of many states and cities, wearing a mask has become an important part of daily life. A mask, combined with social distancing, greatly reduces the chances of these droplets reaching others around you and greatly decreases the odds of spreading the virus.

Cloth face coverings should be worn when in public spaces. They are recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help prevent transmission when used as a complement to social distancing. They are not a replacement for adequate distancing.

At all polling places, face coverings should be required for poll workers and are strongly encouraged for voters. Refer to local and state guidance on relevant face covering requirements.

### How to wear a mask or face cover

The CDC recommends keeping these criteria in mind when wearing a mask or face cover:

- › It should be snug but comfortable against the sides of the face.
- › It should cover the mouth and nose.
- › It needs to be secured with ties or ear loops.
- › It should be made with multiple layers of material.
- › It must allow you to breathe without restriction.
- › It should be able to withstand machine washing and drying without getting damaged or changing shape.
- › Disposable masks should be thrown away after each use.

### How to keep masks and face covers clean

The CDC recommends washing cloth face masks frequently, either by hand or in a washing machine. Individuals should take care not to touch their eyes, nose, mouth or face when removing a worn face covering, and to wash their hands immediately after removing them as they may carry infectious contaminants.



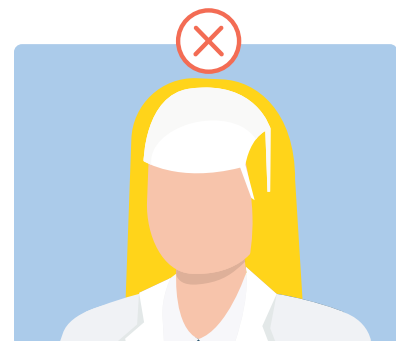
**Correct**



**Mask Necklace**



**Mask Goatee**



**Mask Visor**



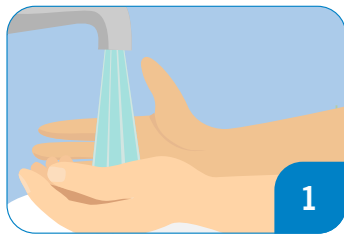
## Handwashing

Washing our hands is one of the easiest and most important things we help can do to stay healthy and control the spread of bacteria and viruses.

### Wash your hands:

- › Whenever they look dirty.
- › Before, during and after you prepare food.
- › Before eating.
- › Before and after contact with an ill person.
- › Before and after treating a cut, sore or wound.
- › After using the toilet or changing diapers.
- › When entering or exiting the home.
- › After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. (Wash your hands more often when you are sick to prevent spreading your illness to those around you.)
- › After touching animals or animal waste.
- › After touching garbage, body fluids, or anytime you have doubt if your hands are clean.

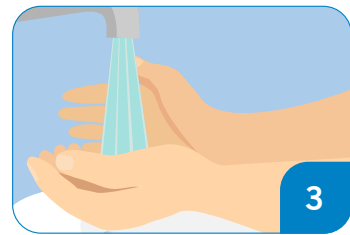
### What's the proper technique for hand washing?



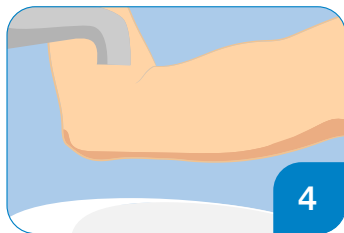
**Wet your hands** with clean running water (warm or cold).



**Lather your hands** with soap. Rub together 20+ seconds. Don't forget wrists, back of hands, between fingers and under nails.



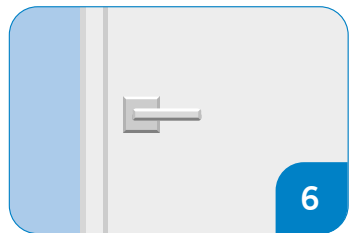
**Rinse your hands** well under running water.



**Turn off the water** with your elbow (or a clean towel).



**Dry your hands** with a clean towel or air dry them.



**Used a towel?** Use it to open the bathroom door.

### When should we use alcohol-based hand sanitizers?

The CDC recommends washing hands with soap and water whenever possible to reduce the amounts and types of all germs and chemicals on them. However, if soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol should be used. Hand sanitizers with lower alcohol levels are not as effective in killing germs.

### Avoid wearing gloves in public

Gloves aren't always an effective protective measure for many reasons, especially when not worn or disposed of properly. There could be a tear or rip in the gloves, you could put them on or take them off incorrectly and the gloves may give you a false sense of security. Any germs that might be on your gloves can be transferred to all other surfaces and items you touch. Rather than wearing gloves improperly, in most circumstances, it is safer to go bare handed in public and wash your hands frequently.

## Distancing

Coronavirus spreads mainly among people who are in close contact with each other for prolonged periods of time. Since people can spread the virus before they begin to feel sick, it is important to maintain distance from others when possible.

This means practicing social and physical distancing. Social distancing means avoiding large gatherings. Physical distancing means maintaining distance (at least 6 feet or 2 meters) from others when possible. Both social and physical distancing are important precautions.

There are three key factors to consider when contemplating an activity or event: time, space and people.

### Time

Carefully weigh how much time you'll be spending at the activity. Less time means limiting your risk of exposure to the virus.

### Space

Is the activity or event taking place outside or indoors? If it's indoors, consider how enclosed or ventilated the space is. During the pandemic, it is safer to be outside than inside (but that doesn't mean your chance of catching the virus outside is zero). You should consider if the space has a limit on how many people can be there at one time. This will clue you in on how easy or difficult it will be to maintain physical distance from others.

**S — A — F — E**

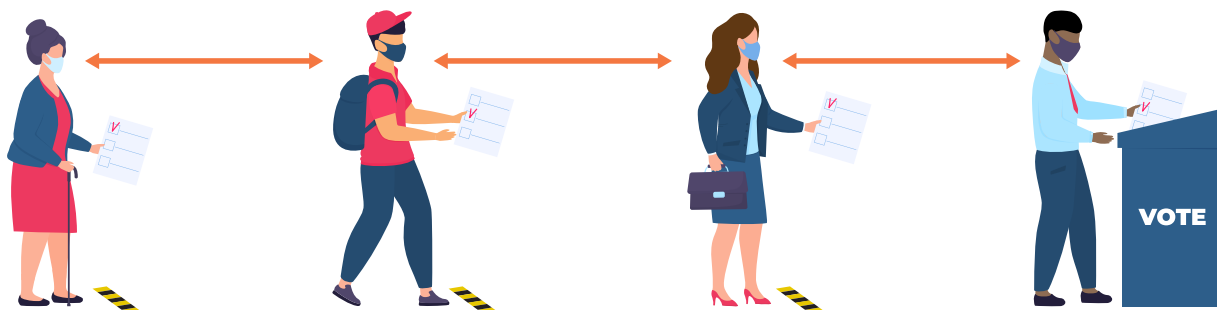
**SIX AWAY FROM EVERYONE**

**Keep 6 feet between you + others to help prevent the spread.**

### People

Consider if the people with whom you'll be interacting are following and respecting safety guidelines, which include:

- › Physical distancing of at least 6 feet.
- › Wearing a face mask.
- › Practicing good hand hygiene and cleanliness.
- › Not sharing food or touching common surfaces.
- › Staying home when feeling sick.





## Practical Tips for Voters

### Adjust

- › **Cloth face coverings should be worn when in public spaces**, including polling locations.
- › **Use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol frequently, especially after touching common surfaces or shared items.** Washing your hands is one of the easiest and most important things you can do to stay healthy and control the spread of bacteria and viruses.
- › **Practice physical distancing**, which means maintaining distancing (at least 6 feet) from others when possible. If you run into someone you know at the polls, use an alternate greeting rather than shaking hands.
- › **Be prepared for longer lines** that may extend outside of buildings.

### Consider

- › **Avoid wearing gloves in public.** Gloves can rip, or be put on or removed incorrectly and may give you a false sense of security. Rather than wearing gloves improperly, in most circumstances, it is safer to go bare handed in public and wash your hands frequently.
- › **Leverage early voting or vote by mail** options if your jurisdiction allows to avoid crowded polling places, congestion and lines. For a list of states/districts that allow early voting and specific rules, visit: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/policy-area/elections/>.
- › **Vote at off-peak times of day**, avoiding the lunch or after-work rush, if possible.
- › **Bring your own supplies**, such as hand sanitizer, an ink pen for paper ballots, or a stylus for touchscreen machines. Verify with an election official before using your own supplies.

# **For Poll Workers and Election Officials**



## Overview

The coronavirus pandemic has created a number of new challenges. The 2020 election cycle is no exception. There are a variety of preventive measures that can be enacted, both by local election boards and by individual citizens, to minimize the spread of COVID-19 during the voting process.

These resources will help voters, poll workers and election officials through the key elements of preparing for an election amid the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- › Making sure your facility is fully clean, disinfected and equipped with a blueprint for maintaining safe conditions.
- › Creating a plan for a safe voting environment that protects poll workers and voters alike from risks connected to COVID-19, including exposure and transmission.

## Screening

The CDC recommends screening your employees and poll workers by:

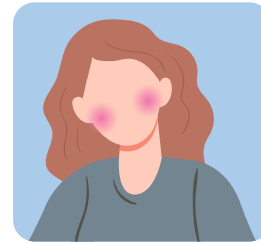
### 1. Having employees and poll workers take their temperature before coming to work, or when they arrive.



Confirming their **temperature is less than 100.4°F (38.0°C).**



Confirming they are **NOT coughing or experiencing shortness of breath.**



**Looking for signs of illness**, which could include flushed cheeks and/or fatigue.

### 2. Following recommended barrier controls or using proper PPE for screeners:

- › Stand behind a physical barrier (glass or plastic partition) to protect their face and mucous membranes from respiratory droplets that may be produced when employees cough, sneeze or talk.
- › If no physical barrier is available, put on a facemask, eye protection (goggles or disposable face shield that fully covers the front and sides of your face), a single pair of disposable gloves and a gown if you expect to have extensive contact with the employee.
- › Clean your hands with either soap and water for 20 seconds or with hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- › Use a new pair of disposable gloves. If disposable or non-contact thermometers are used to screen multiple employees and you did not have physical contact with an individual, you do not need to change your gloves before the next check.
- › Look for signs of illness, which could include flushed cheeks or fatigue.
- › Confirm employees aren't coughing or experiencing shortness of breath.
- › Check the employee's temperature by reaching around or through an opening in the partition. (Keep your face behind the barrier at all times.)
- › If non-contact thermometers are used, follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting.
- › Reusable thermometers must be cleaned between each check.
- › After screening the last employee, remove and discard PPE and gloves, and clean your hands with either soap and water for 20 seconds or with hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.



## How do I manage a poll worker who has symptoms or becomes ill at work?

Follow these steps if a poll worker begins having suspected COVID-19 symptoms or feels ill during the work day:

- › Immediately separate the poll worker who is ill from others.
- › Send the poll worker home and instruct them to follow-up with a healthcare provider for appropriate testing and treatment.
- › Close off all areas that the ill poll worker was using.
- › Refer to the CDC's guidance for cleaning and disinfecting your building when someone is sick.
- › If emergent medical care is needed, call 911.

## What should I do if a poll worker has been exposed to someone who has COVID-19?

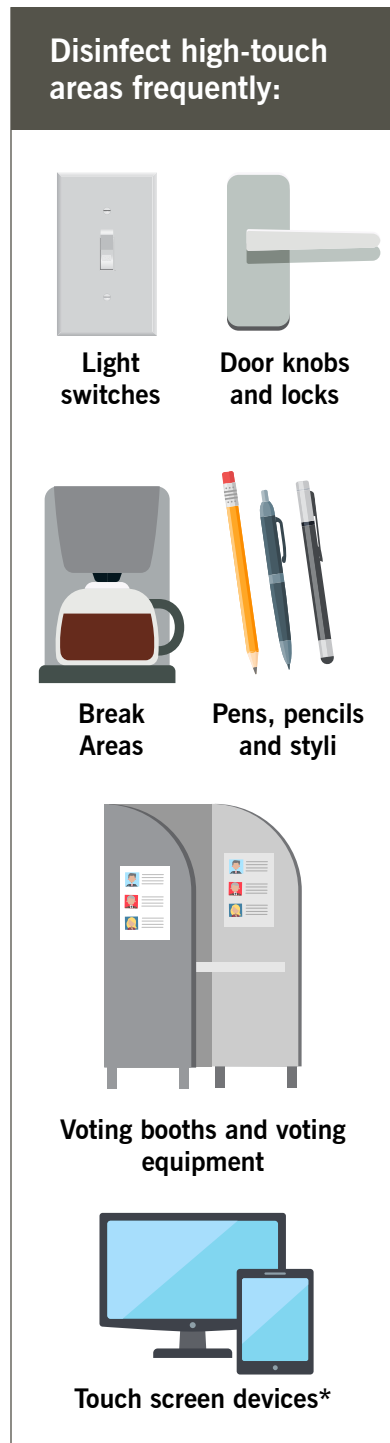
Follow these procedures for poll workers who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 but are asymptomatic:

- › Screen all of your poll workers for temperature and symptoms when they arrive at work each day.
- › Perform regular self-monitoring as outlined by your occupational health program.
- › If not already required, ensure affected employees wear face masks in the workplace for 14 days from the date of the exposure.
- › Maintain physical distance guidelines of at least 6 feet from others in the polling place.
- › Disinfect and clean works spaces, especially shared spaces and equipment.

## Cleaning and Disinfecting

This election cycle, we need to take extra precautions to help keep our polling places safer for ourselves, our families and our communities. These include regular cleaning and disinfecting, especially of high-touch surfaces.

**Disinfect high-touch areas frequently:**



**Light switches**      **Door knobs and locks**

**Break Areas**      **Pens, pencils and styli**

**Voting booths and voting equipment**

**Touch screen devices\***

Cleaning removes dust and dirt from a surface. Disinfecting, when properly performed, helps destroy bacteria and viruses on hard, nonporous surfaces. Disinfecting a surface after cleaning it can help control the spread of germs from surfaces.

The CDC recommends using household disinfectants approved by the EPA for use against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes coronavirus disease. You can see the list [here](#).

### Practical cleaning and disinfection tips include:

- › Always read and follow the directions listed on the label of the cleaning product as well as the item being cleaned. Pay special attention to the precautionary statements on how to safely handle cleaning and disinfecting products. For electronics, refer to manufacturer's guide for cleaning instructions.
- › Wear gloves and appropriate personal protective equipment.
- › Ensure adequate ventilation.
- › Do not use more of the product than what is recommended on the label.
- › If disinfectant products are not readily available, you can make your own using 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) of bleach per gallon of room temperature water.
- › If the cleaning product requires diluting, dilute as instructed on the label.
- › Avoid mixing chemical products.
- › Disinfect all frequently touched surfaces using EPA-approved disinfectants that meet CDC requirements for use and effectiveness against viruses and bacteria, including the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

\*For electronics, refer to manufacturer's guide for cleaning instructions.



## Practical Tips for Poll Workers and Election Officials

### Consider

- › **Raise awareness of early voting or alternative voting methods as jurisdiction allows** in order to reduce crowds and lines that may make physical distancing difficult to maintain.
- › **Require cloth face coverings for poll workers.**  
Election officials may also consider the additional coverage of a plastic face shield worn over a face mask to prevent any airborne particles from reaching the eyes and to discourage touching the face. Face coverings can make communication more difficult for individuals with certain disabilities; ensure that you have alternative communication plans for these instances, such as writing messages or donning a clear face covering, consistent with applicable laws.
- › **Strongly encourage face coverings for voters.**  
Consider offering face coverings for those who do not have them. Refer to local and state guidance on relevant face covering requirements.
- › **Use engineered controls**, including plexiglass partitions, as a barrier between you and the general public.
- › **Provide voters hand sanitizer**, with at least 60% alcohol, for use before and after entering the polling place.
- › **Maintain physical distancing throughout the facility from other election workers and the public.** Increase distance between voting booths to ensure a distance of 6 feet between each booth. Use floor markers or other signage to reinforce physical distancing, and clearly mark entrances and exits to avoid congestion. Create one-way traffic flows whenever possible.
- › **Ensure adequate supplies to support healthy behaviors.** These include face masks for all poll workers and extra for the public, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, EPA-approved disinfectants, paper towels and no-touch trash receptacles.
- › **Minimize hand-off of personal items or**

**identification between poll workers and voter.** Allow voters to manage any documentation themselves and encourage hand hygiene after touching any equipment. Poll workers should clean their hands after any contact with voters or their personal items.

- › **Develop a plan for how reusables will be managed and disinfected during the voting process**, including ink pens, touch screens, manila folders, authentication cards and headphones for voters with disabilities. When possible, replace shared objects with single-use alternatives.
- › **Vulnerable populations should seek alternative, non-public-facing ways to volunteer for the general election.**
- › **Avoid communal foods, including cookies and other prepared foods, during breaks.** Bring individually wrapped snacks and your own water bottle.
- › **Ensure adequate staff levels at polls** to cover any workers who are ill and need to stay home.
- › **Remember that CARES Act funding** has been set aside to help states administer voting during the pandemic.

### Communicate

- › **Inform voters of the prevention strategies** put in place at polling locations well in advance of election day, including information about alternative voting options.
- › **Post signage throughout the polling place to reinforce prevention measures.** Include reminders about the importance of handwashing, face masks and physical distancing, as well as cough etiquette.
- › **Encourage election officials and poll workers to stay home if sick.**

## How to respond if a voter refuses to wear a mask

There are many reasons an individual may opt not to wear a mask. To diffuse the situation:

- › Listen to the individual.
- › Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation.
- › Reframe the request:
  - Say “We are asking everyone to wear masks to keep other voters and election officials safe. There is no way of knowing who has COVID-19 just by looking at them. Your safety – and that of our community – is the most important thing to us.”
- › If the individual continues to refuse to don a face mask, try to limit their interaction with others at the polling location. Be sure to disinfect affected areas when the individual leaves and then practice hand hygiene.



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Please visit [clevelandclinic.org/Covid19atwork](https://clevelandclinic.org/Covid19atwork) for the latest updates or to request additional information.

## About Cleveland Clinic

Cleveland Clinic is a nonprofit, multi-specialty academic medical center that integrates clinical and hospital care with research and education. Cleveland Clinic was founded in 1921 by four renowned physicians with a vision of providing outstanding patient care based upon the principles of cooperation, compassion and innovation. Today, Cleveland Clinic is one of the largest and most respected hospitals in the country. *U.S. News & World Report* consistently names Cleveland Clinic as one of the nation's best hospitals in its annual "America's Best Hospitals" survey. Each year thousands of patients travel to Cleveland Clinic from every state in the nation and more than 180 countries around the world.

## About The Bipartisan Policy Center

The Bipartisan Policy Center is a Washington, DC-based think tank that actively fosters bipartisanship by combining the best ideas from both parties to promote health, security, and opportunity for all Americans. Our policy solutions are the product of informed deliberations by former elected and appointed officials, business and labor leaders, and academics and advocates who represent both sides of the political spectrum.

For more information about how to cope  
with the COVID-19 pandemic,  
visit [clevelandclinic.org/copingwithcovid19](https://clevelandclinic.org/copingwithcovid19).

