



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
Electoral Commission

2021 Local Government Ordinary Elections

COVID-19 ELECTION MANAGEMENT PLAN

July 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) will manage elections on behalf of some 95 of the State's 139 local governments at the 16 October 2021 local government ordinary elections. The great majority of these will be full postal elections, while it is likely just five will be conducted as in person ballots.

These elections will be conducted under the context of the on-going COVID-19 global pandemic, and all the uncertainties and public policy settings that have been associated with the pandemic.

The Commission and its appointed Returning Officers (ROs) will work with local government clients and relevant Government authorities to ensure that maintaining the safety of electors, candidates, local government staff, electoral officials and other election participants remains at the forefront of election planning and decision making.

These elections still need to be conducted in accordance with the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1995* and the *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997*. Nevertheless, emergency community safety related rulings made under the provisions of the *Public Health Act 2016 (WA)* and the *Emergency Management Act 2005 (WA)* may impact on election processes and arrangements.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the WAEC has consulted with and sought advice from relevant officials from both the Department of Health and WA Police in the development of its COVID related election plans and guidelines.

As has been seen over the past 16 months of the pandemic, circumstances can change rapidly, and public health related decisions can significantly impact the conduct of an electoral event. Accordingly, stakeholders need to be aware that long standing procedures and arrangements may need to be changed at short notice.

Should there be community transmission or a prescribed lockdown during the local government election period, depending on the precise circumstances, the Commission will endeavour to follow the directions and public health guidelines of the Department of Health at the time in order to determine the most appropriate steps. Periods of no community transmission may be referred to in this plan as 'COVID Normal' and will generally mean the more intensive safety and preventative measures may not be required (e.g. the wearing of masks).

In certain emergency circumstances, the *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997* contain provisions that allow for either the adjournment or postponement of polling by a Returning Officer. This would only occur under extreme circumstances.

This document simply provides an overview of COVID related guiding principles and steps to be followed by the WAEC during the 2021 local government ordinary elections. Selected audience specific guidelines may supplement this Plan (e.g. RO Guidelines). It is also important to note that each local government will have existing COVID plans and venue specific safety plans which must be considered in conjunction with WAEC plans.

COVID-19 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION GUIDE

The WAEC has produced a brief *COVID-19 Local Government Election Guide* (see Appendix 1) that provides summary information for electors, candidates, scrutineers, electoral officials and local government staff. It provides basic information concerning the nature of the COVID-19 virus and how to protect oneself and others, as well as some of the key steps being taken to safeguard stakeholders during these elections.

As indicated in the Guide, should there be a need for COVID related election updates during the course of the local government elections, these will be posted to the WAEC website at www.elections.wa.gov.au.

More general COVID related information is available via the Coronavirus Information Helpline on 13 COVID (13 268 43) or for announcements specific to Western Australia, visit – www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/covid-19-coronavirus-latest-updates

COVID-19 SAFETY MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED

The level of infection prevention and control measures to be implemented at election venues will be based on an assessment of the COVID risk, the locality/region, the type of election (postal or in person), and the applicable public health and movement rulings at the time. The following are some of the actions that are most likely to apply:

- Local government Returning Officers to perform the functions of the event COVID Safety Marshall
- All electoral officials, irrespective of their role, to complete the mandatory WAEC online COVID induction training
- If applicable at the time, all election related venues (i.e. for the replacement of postal packages, ballot paper issuing, postal vote processing, and vote counting) will have a *COVID-19 Venue Safety Plan* at entry points that specifies the maximum number of persons that can be present at any one time (based on the 2 or 4 sqm rule)
- Existing venue SafeWA QR Code signs will apply at all local government managed venues, as well as the existing manual contact registration system
- Other COVID related signage to be posted near entrances (e.g. Protect Yourself and Others) and within venues
- Venues to be set up in a manner that facilitates and encourages physical distancing; including the use of yellow physical distancing tape at queuing points and the like
- If applicable at the time, masks will be mandatory for all electoral officials and scrutineers (while on the count floor) and encouraged for all other site visitors
- Hand sanitiser to be available at the entrance to all electoral venues
- Regular wipe down of shared surfaces and common touch points using disinfectant wipes
- Cardboard voting screens to incorporate a plastic insert on the bench surface to allow for regular cleaning

- Single use pens and pencils to be provided as required
- All Returning Officers will be supplied with a COVID-19 RO's Pack containing all PPE, materials and signage they may require (See Appendix 2)
- In addition to masks, other PPE to be available for staff as required (e.g. gloves for wiping down surfaces)
- Used masks, cleaning wipes and gloves to be disposed of immediately after use and bagged before being disposed of
- Key WAEC service providers and suppliers such as printers, mailing houses, Australia Post and temporary personnel providers to have appropriate COVID management plans in place
- A specific COVID plan and staff training arrangements to apply at the WAEC's central Processing Centre
- All WAEC personnel to adopt time and venue applicable COVID safety measures, including use of the SafeWA QR app, physical distancing, COVID personal etiquette, and mask wearing if required
- At in person elections, any electoral official required to enter a hospital, aged care facility or remote Aboriginal community must be able to show evidence of a current flu vaccination (as well as any other requirements that may be applicable at the time).

The WAEC's COVID response and the balance of measures adopted by individual Returning Officers, will vary according to the circumstances at the time and whether there is community transmission, either at a localised or state-wide level.

ELECTION VENUE MANAGEMENT

Unlike a State general election, local government elections are conducted in close cooperation with local government authorities and the venues used as polling places and for the count are typically owned and managed by the local government. Accordingly, existing arrangements such as COVID visitor registration, SafeWA QR code signage, OSH and evacuation plans will typically be utilised.

Returning Officers will be supplied with an emergency manual contact registration pad in case a venue does not have arrangements in place at the time. All registration slips or pads completed during election related activities are to be left with the local government, so that should contact tracing be required, the data can be obtained by Health authorities from the one source.

Returning Officers will perform the role of COVID Safety Marshall at polling places and during the count on election day.

Postal Vote Processing Centre

The WAEC will lease a site at the Northbridge Centre (Cnr Beaufort and James Streets) within the Perth CBD in order to process returned postal vote packages and prepare the materials for distribution to ROs at their respective local governments before the close of polling.

This Processing Centre will display SafeWA QR code signage and other COVID related signs; provide all site visitors with access to hand sanitiser and have sufficient supplies of PPE and other COVID related materials.

A trained Facilities Manager will manage the venue when operational and perform the role of COVID Safety Marshall. This will include responsibility for staff induction (COVID and OSH for the site) and ensuring that related safety measures are implemented and monitored.

Beaufort St Processing Centre Guidelines – COVID Normal

- Staff to adhere to the *WA Electoral Commission Staff COVID-19 Safety Guidelines – Beaufort St Processing Centre*
- COVID-19 protocols lead by the COVID Safety Marshal who will ensure that hygiene and physical distancing is followed in compliance with Department of Health
- Staff to register daily with the SafeWA App on start of roster at entry
- Staff to enter and exit same way each day
- The Commission to provide consistent rostering of staff and lunch break that staff must adhere to
- Hand Sanitiser to be used at entry and throughout Centre
- Staff to be encouraged to have lunch outdoors
- Staff to stay within dedicated area where possible and on start and completion of shift to wipe down area including any IT equipment
- Staff not to attend if feeling unwell

Beaufort St Processing Centre Guidelines – Community Transmission

- In addition to above
- All staff will be provided with regular briefings and information when Department of Health has provided update
 - Further physical spacing within the centre.
 - Appropriate clean down of all goods returned before moving into the different sections
 - Ingress / egress management of Centre implemented
 - Increase cleaners and times
 - PPE as instructed by Department of Health along with signage (e.g. masks to be worn)

COVID SAFETY MARSHALL ROLE

While the precise functions of a COVID Safety Marshall may vary according to the location, venue, timing and operational activity, the various tasks and responsibilities will include all or some of the following:

- Remind all election staff of the need to complete the mandatory online COVID training program
- Endeavour to ensure that COVID hygiene practices and physical distancing are followed in compliance with Department of Health measures for electors, election officials, candidates, scrutineers and other site visitors
- Set-up workspace as per the *COVID-19 Voting Venue Safety Plan* and completing the capacity allowed in the venue in line with current restrictions and ensuring compliance

- Set-up venue to facilitate and encourage physical distancing; including use of yellow physical distancing tape to mark queuing points, etc
- Separating voting screens and use of voting plastic inserts on screen bench surface
- Appropriate placement of COVID-19 signage, including SafeWA QR code signs, Venue Safety Plan and the Protect Yourself and Others sign
- Set-up or ensure continuance of the existing manual contact registration system for site visitors unable to use the SafeWA app
- Ensuring correct recording and storage of the venue's manual contact registration slips or pads
- Hand sanitiser management including set up of entry hand sanitiser and provision of staff personal sanitiser where applicable
- Ensuring shared surfaces such as issuing tables and voting screen bench tops, along with common touch points such as door handles, are regularly wiped down with the disinfectant wipes provided
- Ensuring wipes, gloves and masks are disposed of immediately after use and bagged before placement in appropriate rubbish bins
- Ensuring a supply of single use pens and/or pencils is available where required
- Management and distribution of PPE as required at the time
- Ensuring staff and visitor numbers stay within the *COVID-19 Venue Safety Plan*
- Briefing staff and site visitors such as scrutineers on the applicable COVID safety rules and guidelines – in line with *COVID-19 Local Government Election Guide*.

ELECTION CONTRACTORS

At local government elections the WAEC utilises a range of suppliers and contractors to provide support services and provide necessary materials. The WAEC will request confirmation from suppliers and contractors that they operate under a current COVID-Safe Plan and that there is a system in place for contact tracing if it is requested by the Department of Health. This is particularly applicable to those businesses such as the postal vote printers/mailing houses where electoral officials may be present at times.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING

On an as needs basis, the WAEC will work with local government clients, the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC), and the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA), as well as the Department of Health, WA Police and the whole of government media and communications teams where required, to ensure that there is consistent messaging to electors, local governments and staff re COVID-19.

Relevant COVID-19 related updates will be posted to the homepage of the WAEC's website, as well as being distributed to all WAEC appointed Returning Officers for on-

sending to their local government clients (for posting on their websites, social media and notice boards) and other stakeholders where applicable (e.g. candidates).

While the level of paid advertising on traditional and digital media channels is somewhat limited at local government ordinary elections compared to a State general election, the WAEC can also utilise its Facebook and Twitter social media pages for COVID related messaging. In addition, staff at the WAEC operated Call Centre (which operates across the entire voting period at local government elections) will be provided with any COVID updates and FAQs in order to respond to COVID related enquiries.

Key messages to electors will include the recommendation that they complete and return their postal voting package as soon as possible after it arrives in the mail, in case of COVID related delays to postal delivery services. Additionally, while voting at local government elections is important and will be actively encouraged, it is not compulsory and therefore individuals who do not participate for perceived COVID concerns will not be penalised.

The WAEC has consulted with DLGSC and WALGA on the development of shared general promotion and messaging themes for these elections. However, it must be noted that in terms of whole of local government sector COVID information and messaging, the WAEC does not manage all local government elections, thus whole of sector advice/information needs to stem from DLGSC and WALGA.

As indicated, it must be acknowledged that circumstances can change quickly under the COVID pandemic environment and considerations such as whether the 2 or 4 sqm rule applies or not; whether staff are included or excluded from the maximum number of persons calculation; whether masks need to be worn; and so on, can all change at short notice. Returning Officers and election stakeholders need to be prepared for short notice changes and the WAEC will do its best to keep stakeholders informed of any such changes.

Appendix 1

COVID-19 Local Government Election Guide

General information for staff, electoral officials, candidates and scrutineers

COVID-19 BACKGROUND

COVID-19 is a viral infection that spreads through droplet and contact transmission.

Droplets caused by a cough or sneeze can travel through the air for a short distance (about 1m-1.5m) and can settle on surfaces where they land.

Droplets carrying COVID-19 infectious particles can cause infection if they enter our eyes, nose or mouth.

This may be from inhaling droplets or through the transfer of droplets from contaminated surfaces to our eyes, nose or mouth via our hands.

The symptoms of a COVID-19 infection may include:

- fever of 37.5 C or above (OR fever in the previous few days, including night sweats or chills)
- respiratory symptoms (such as coughing, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose)
- Sudden loss of smell or taste.

IF FEELING UNWELL

If you feel unwell or are displaying COVID or flu-like symptoms do not attend a polling place, count venue or WA Electoral Commission processing centre in any capacity.

If already in attendance, go home and seek medical attention as soon as possible.

If you have visited a declared exposure site, get tested immediately and remain home until you have returned a negative test result.

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM COVID-19

By practising physical distancing, regularly washing or sanitising your hands, avoiding touching your face and practicing respiratory etiquette.

- practise physical distancing - keep at least 1.5 metres or two arms lengths apart from others wherever possible

- practise good personal hygiene - wash hands often with soap and water or hand sanitiser, and cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or using your elbow
- stay home if unwell and get tested for COVID-19 if you are experiencing virus symptoms
- download and use the Safe WA app or complete manual registers.

COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION

If there is community transmission or a declared lock-down in WA during a local government electoral event, the WA Electoral Commission and its officials will follow directions and guidance issued by WA Police and the Department of Health to determine the most appropriate course of action, within the context of the Local Government Act and Regulations.

HAND SANITISER

The WA Electoral Commission will ensure hand sanitiser is available at venues used on polling day and during the subsequent count, for use by anyone in attendance.

Electoral officials are to utilise hand sanitiser and/or wash their hands with soap regularly.

MASKS

If State Government authorities mandate the wearing of masks during an election period, all persons involved will be required to provide their own masks. A small quantity of masks will be available from the Returning Officer for emergency purposes.

The following guidelines apply:

- Clean masks to be kept separate from used/dirty masks to prevent cross contamination
- Used masks to be correctly disposed of immediately
- Hand hygiene to be performed prior to removing or donning a mask.

CONTACT TRACING REGISTRATION

Everyone attending an election venue is required to register their attendance by scanning the site specific QR code using the SafeWA App or by completing a Contact Register slip or pad provided near the entrance.

Every local government venue should have its own QR code and/or visitor registration process.

SURFACE CLEANING

On polling day and during counting, electoral officials are responsible for regularly wiping down shared surfaces (e.g. voting screens and count tables) and common

touch points (e.g. door handles) using the disinfectant wipes and gloves provided by the Returning Officer.

Used wipes and gloves must be bagged and disposed of immediately in a rubbish bin.

VENUE SAFETY PLAN

Depending on the COVID pandemic status at the time, it is possible that all venues used for electoral purposes will apply the 2sqm or 4sqm rule. This means that the area of the room or space to be used will dictate the number of persons who can be present at any one time (e.g. under a 2 sqm rule, a 80sqm room can accommodate no more than 40 people). The maximum number of persons that can be present will be written on the Venue Safety Plan sign near the entrance.

SCRUTINEERS

The number of scrutineers that can be present at polling places, processing centres and count venues at any one time may need to be limited and regulated in accordance with relevant public health directives.

Scrutineers must follow lawful directions given by a Returning Officer or Count Table Supervisor. When on the count floor, scrutineers must wear the yellow vest provided by the Returning officer.

FURTHER INFORMATION

To view possible information updates relating to COVID-19 during local government elections visit www.elections.wa.gov.au or contact the Coronavirus Information Helpline on 13 COVID (13 268 43).

As at 26 July 2021

Appendix 2

Returning Officer COVID-19 Pack List

Item no	Description of Stationery / Materials	Unit	Qty
CONSUMABLES			
8150	Bag Plastic Clear Self-Seal 345MM X 400MM <i>(For stowing completed COVID Visitor Record Slips)</i>	Each	1
1190	Blu Tack Strip	Strip	2
9665	Gloves Nitrite Disposable Blue Size Medium	Each	1
9670	Gloves Nitrite Disposable Blue Size Large	Each	1
9635	Hand Wash SANITISER 50ML Tube	Tube	10
9605	Hand Wash SANITISER Pump Bottle (1 Litre)	Each	1
1123	Masks Face Disposable Pack 50	Each	1
9595	Tape Measure Retractable 3 M	Each	1
9645	Tape PVC Social Distancing Yellow 48MM x 33 MM	Roll	1
9610	Wipes Disposable Detergent / Disinfectant (Pack 100)	Pack	1
9615	Voting Screen Inserts <i>(Supplied with Voting Screens)</i>	Each	2
FORMS / GUIDES / SIGNS			
NS	Guide – COVID 19 Local Government Election	Each	15
NS	Forms - COVID Visitor Record Slips	Pad	1
NS	Signs – Protect Yourself and Others - A3	Each	2
NS	Signs – Venue Safety Plan - A4	Each	2
ITEMS FOR ISSUE TO LG 'IN PERSON' ELECTIONS ONLY			
9730	Box COVID <i>(For stowing completed COVID Visitor Record Slips)</i>	Each	1
9615	Voting Screen Inserts <i>(Supplied with Voting Screens)</i>	Each	4