



COVIDSafe Election Handbook

September 2022

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country 3

Introduction..... 4

Context..... 4

Model of operations 4

Principles 5

COVIDSafe protection measures at election venues 5

COVIDSafe protection measures for staff and contractors 5

COVIDSafe protection measures for scrutineers 6

COVIDSafe protection measures for voters 6

COVID-19 vaccination requirements 7

Summary of safety measures at election venues 8

Acknowledgement of Country

The VEC acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation, as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and conduct our business. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and emerging. We are committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich history of political, educational and cultural engagement across Australia.

Introduction

The Victorian State election will be held in November 2022. It will be conducted with a mix of attendance and postal voting. The purpose of this VEC COVIDSafe election handbook is to outline the actions the VEC is taking to deliver a safe and compliant State election in the face of the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Context

COVID-19 is an infectious illness caused by a highly contagious virus. It can be spread by people who are infected but asymptomatic. The World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 to be a Public Health Emergency and a pandemic.

The VEC will comply with relevant Pandemic Orders and other legislation or regulations in place. The VEC will also consider the advice of the Victorian Chief Health Officer, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), and other relevant bodies regarding good COVID-19 management practices and will incorporate these into VEC operations. The VEC will also comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (Vic) requirement to eliminate or otherwise minimise risks to health and safety as far as is reasonably practicable.

The VEC also takes steps in line with health advice to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in high-risk settings when engaging with people in the community who are most at risk of severe illness due to an infection.

Model of operations

Victoria's 2022 State election will see up to 4.6 million enrolled voters and more than 800 candidates participate in 96 discrete elections. The election will be delivered through 88 election offices, which will open across Victoria on 1 November. To support election delivery, 10 metropolitan hubs will be established. The hubs will deliver election materials to voting centres, and receive materials returned from voting centres after election day.

Early voting at more than 150 locations commences at 9 am on Monday 14 November and continues until the day before election day. Limited mobile voting services will be offered in locations such as aged care homes. People who cannot vote in person will be offered the option of voting by post. Telephone assisted voting will be available for people who are blind or have low vision, electors with a physical disability, and eligible electors in isolation due to COVID-19 or affected by emergency situations such as floods and bushfires.

Election day is Saturday 26 November. Approximately 1,750 voting centres will be opened across Victoria. Most will be located in schools, church halls, and community centres. In-person attendance voting opens at 8 am and closes at 6 pm.

The centralised activity site supports a wide range of election activities. These include the processing of early voting done via post, the delivery of telephone assisted voting, and the sorting and counting of votes cast by voters outside of their home district along with declaration votes.

Voting closes at 6 pm on election day and counting commences immediately. The count takes around 2 weeks to complete. It is a highly coordinated, complex activity requiring a large workforce and access by scrutineers and registered political party officials.

Principles

The VEC has considered the impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic on the conduct of the State election and continues to monitor the situation carefully. This VEC COVIDSafe election handbook summarises actions the VEC is taking to minimise the impact of COVID-19 on the community and election participants, operations, and integrity.

The VEC will ensure that the State election:

- is safe and accessible for all participants
- complies with the relevant provisions of the *Electoral Act 2002* and associated regulations
- reassures registered political parties, candidates, and voters of the integrity of the election and its results
- enables the successful management of the consequences of a COVID-19 outbreak
- complies with all State and Commonwealth directions to limit the spread of COVID-19.

COVIDSafe protection measures at election venues

- Where reasonably practicable, physical distancing of 1.5 metres between people will be maintained, including between workstations and in meeting rooms and reception areas.
- Ongoing daily cleaning and disinfection schedules will apply, with additional cleaning measures in place for specific tasks or activities as identified by a risk assessment.
- Signage about COVID-19 precautions will be on display, as required.
- Handwashing facilities or hand sanitiser will be available for common use.
- Face masks will be available for use by staff and visitors.
- Where permissible, safe, and practical to do so, windows and doors will be opened or air conditioning units adjusted to encourage airflow.
- Staff will be instructed to manage queues at busy voting centres.

COVIDSafe protection measures for staff and contractors

- Staff and contractors must not attend work in person if they are experiencing COVID-19 or cold and flu like symptoms. Symptoms include headache, fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose. They must stay home, get tested, and either work from home or take sick leave until they are well.

- Staff and contractors who are subject to mandatory quarantine or who are required to self-isolate (including following a COVID-19 test) must not attend work in person.
- Staff and contractors must be vaccinated to attend work in person. They must provide evidence they are vaccinated or have an approved exemption.
- Staff and contractors should maintain a physical distance of at least 1.5 metres wherever possible.
- Staff and contractors in some locations will be asked to participate in surveillance testing using rapid antigen tests (RATs).
- Staff and contractors are encouraged to wear a mask at all times and must wear a face mask when directed to do so.
- Staff and contractors must wear a mask when on public transport, in taxis and ride shares, and when travelling in a work fleet vehicle with other people.
- Staff and contractors should practice good hygiene by regularly washing their hands or using the hand sanitiser available throughout the workplace, especially after they cough, sneeze, or blow their nose.
- Staff and contractors must follow signage posted at entrances, arrival points and break rooms to reinforce physical distancing and good hygiene practices.
- Staff and contractors should limit contact time with delivery drivers and couriers.

COVIDSafe protection measures for scrutineers

- Scrutineers should not attend an election venue if they are experiencing COVID-19 or cold and flu like symptoms. Symptoms include headache, fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose.
- Scrutineers who are subject to mandatory quarantine or who are required to self-isolate (including following a COVID-19 test) must not attend an election venue.
- Scrutineers should maintain a physical distance of at least 1.5 metres wherever possible.
- Scrutineers should wear a face mask when asked to do so.
- Scrutineers should practice good hygiene by regularly washing their hands or using the hand sanitiser available at the venue, especially after they cough, sneeze, or blow their nose.
- Scrutineers should follow signage posted at entrances, arrival points and break rooms to reinforce physical distancing and good hygiene practices.

COVIDSafe protection measures for voters

- Voters who are subject to mandatory quarantine or who are required to self-isolate (including following a COVID-19 test) must not attend an election venue in person and are encouraged to use alternative voting channels.

- Voters should maintain a physical distance of least 1.5 metres wherever possible.
- Voters should practice good hygiene by using the hand sanitiser available at the venue, especially after they cough, sneeze, or blow their nose.
- Voters should follow directional signs, where placed to support the flow of foot traffic within the premises.

COVID-19 vaccination requirements

Infection and serious illness resulting from COVID-19 is a workplace risk. The VEC is required by law to ensure that it provides and maintains a safe workplace. Vaccination is one of the controls the VEC uses to help protect the health and safety of its staff and the participants in the State election. In developing its vaccination policy, the VEC has balanced the obligation to provide a safe workplace against the need to ensure that barriers to electoral participation are kept to a minimum.

The VEC requires its staff and contractors to be vaccinated. The VEC believes that vaccination is a reasonably practicable measure that helps to control the risk posed by COVID-19 in the workplace. The vaccination requirement is more stringent for people who are working for the VEC for an extended period of time. This is because the VEC believes it is reasonably practicable to impose more stringent controls on the part of its workforce that is employed for a longer period.

The VEC has taken a number of things into consideration when making this decision. Roles lasting more than 4 weeks include all of the roles required for the entirety of the election period at more than 150 locations across Victoria. These roles have training and experience that is difficult to replace if the staff fall ill. Roles lasting less than 4 weeks will be active at a time when additional COVID-19 measures will be in place at VEC premises, including the mandatory use of face masks and regular rapid antigen testing of staff. These additional measures allow the VEC to open up these shorter-term positions to more Victorians. More than 85 percent of these roles are for placements of just 1-2 days.

Employment applications will be considered from people who have an approved exemption from vaccination. For their application to be considered, they will need to provide evidence of their exemption, such as a Medicare Immunisation History Statement that lists the exemption.

The VEC has no requirement for voters to be vaccinated.

The VEC has no requirement for candidates, scrutineers, or other party workers to be vaccinated.

A summary of the VEC vaccination policy is presented in the following table.

Category of participant	Vaccination requirement
Voter	No requirement
Candidate (District or Region)	No requirement
Party worker	No requirement
Scrutineer	No requirement
Casual employee (up to 4 weeks)	2 doses

Casual employee (more than 4 weeks)	2 doses + 1 booster
VEC ongoing employee	2 doses + 1 booster

Summary of safety measures at election venues

The following table lists the COVIDSafe protection measures for staff, contractors, scrutineers, and voters at election venues.

	VEC head office	VEC w'house	Election offices & metro hubs	Early voting centres	Mobile early voting	Election day voting centres	Centralised Activity Site	Service provider & community engagement
Handwashing facilities or hand sanitiser for use	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Physical distancing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Face masks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vaccinated staff	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
High touch surface cleaning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
COVID-19 signage	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Rapid antigen tests for staff	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Limit contact with delivery drivers/couriers	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Ventilation airflow	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Cleaning of voting pencils				✓	✓	✓		
Directional signage				✓		✓	✓	
Queue controllers				✓		✓		