

# COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR ORGANIZERS OF CANDIDATE DEBATES AND ELECTORAL POLLING PLACES – STEP 3

Last revised: September 1, 2021

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is currently at Step 3 of the province's [Roadmap to Reopen](#). The following recommendations are intended to assist in keeping electors, election workers, candidates, and candidates' representatives safe while attending **candidate debates** and **electoral polling places** during the current COVID-19 pandemic. This information is meant to supplement any advice or recommendations provided by the organization or community governing the election, including [Elections Canada](#).

This document provides additional guidance and clarity at Step 3, by following [Ontario Regulation 364/20: Rules for Areas at Step 3 and at the Roadmap Exit Step \(O. Reg. 364/20\)](#) under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Approach to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#).

All businesses and organizations in the County of Simcoe and District of Muskoka must also adhere to the SMDHU's medical officer of health's [letter of instruction](#) (amended September 1, 2021).

Additional public health guidance for candidates can be found in SMDHU's [COVID-19 Guidance for Electoral Candidates](#) and the [Operating your Business Safely webpage](#).

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### Candidate Debates

Whenever possible during the pandemic, the SMDHU recommends alternate means to engage the public in **debates** to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission indoors. Please consider proceeding with candidate debates using alternate means or settings including:

- Television broadcast
- Internet broadcast using available technology including but not limited to such interactive forums as Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, etc.
- Radio broadcast
- Outdoor venues

Should a debate be televised, it is recommended that the Film and Television Health and Safety Advisory Committee of the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development [guidance document for film and television industry health and safety during COVID-19](#) be adhered to at all times. Should an in-person debate proceed please consult with the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit as to permitted gathering numbers within the selected venue.

### Electoral Polling Places

The *Canada Elections Act* outlines a range of voting options, including voting on election day or at an advance poll, voting by mail or at an Elections Canada office. While these options will remain available, the pandemic will have an impact on how they can be delivered. Where possible, offer multiple days of in-person voting and increase the number of advance voting locations to reduce the number of voters on election day. Encourage electors to vote-by-mail as a safe and secure alternative to in-person voting.

### NEW: Using Schools for Election Purposes

Ontario's chief medical officer of health recommends that school boards and Elections Canada only consider establishing polling stations in schools that meet the following conditions, especially if the schools being considered are elementary schools:

- There must be a direct path to location of polling station
- There must be separate entrance(s) and exit(s); and
- Must be able to keep students (including children in licensed child care centres co-located in schools) and staff separate from the public.

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## PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19: PROTOCOLS AND POLICIES FOR CANDIDATE DEBATES AND POLLING PLACES

With community transmission of COVID-19 still occurring within Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka and the surrounding areas, there is a risk of transmission from one individual to another, particularly if they are not fully vaccinated.

The risk associated with voting in person and attending candidate debates can be reduced with the implementation of the following public health measures:

### SAFETY PLAN

- A [safety plan](#) must be written and available on request. A copy of the safety plan must be posted in a conspicuous location where it is most likely to come to the attention of individuals working at or attending candidate debates or polling places.
- The safety plan shall describe the implementation of public health measures in the organization, including but not limited to, screening, physical distancing, masks/face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, the wearing of personal protective equipment, and preventing and controlling crowding.
- Additional guidance on how to develop your safety plan can be found [here](#).

### CAPACITY LIMITS

- Consult with the SMDHU regarding capacity limits for the selected venue of electoral debates and polling places.
- Post [Maximum Capacity](#) posters in locations where they can be clearly seen at all entrances to the candidate debate or polling place venue.
- Limit the number of attendees to ensure physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) can be maintained.

### SCREENING AND RECORD KEEPING

- Encourage staff/volunteers, attendees, and voters to conduct a COVID-19 [self-assessment](#) before coming to the polling places station or debate locations, and follow the directions provided.
- Individuals with COVID-19 [symptoms](#) should stay home, seek testing and [self-isolate](#).
- Maintain attendance records for staff and volunteers including name, contact information (name, telephone number/email) and assignment.

### PHYSICAL DISTANCING

- Maintain [physical distancing](#) of at least 2 metres (6 feet) between individuals at debates and polling places.
- Persons waiting in line or congregating outside must also maintain at least 2 metres (6 feet) distance from every other person.
- Assign staff/volunteers to remind individuals of physical distancing measures.
- Post signage that promotes physical distancing at entrances, and in places where people may naturally gather. Sample signage can be found [here](#).
- Provide visible cues for people who may be waiting in line (indoors and outdoors) by placing markers such as tape, safety cones, or painted lines every 2 metres (6 feet).
- Design a walking flow for the whole facility (e.g., one-way routes with signage and/or floor markings). Have separate entry and exit points, if possible.
- Arrange chairs/seating and polling places at least 2 metres (6 feet) apart.

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## MASKS AND FACE COVERINGS

- Masks or [face coverings](#) must be worn at all times inside the polling place.
- Provide masks to electors who need them.
- Masks or face coverings must be worn at all times inside the venue of an in-person debate when members of the public are present.
- In the event an individual has an exception from the mandatory mask requirement, take additional precautions to accommodate voting in a manner that protects everyone's health and safety.
- If the public is not present at a debate, the debaters may remove their masks during the debate where physical distancing can be maintained from all other individuals.
- Post [signage](#) that promotes wearing a mask or face covering at entrances.

## HAND HYGIENE AND RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

- Encourage proper [cough etiquette](#) and individuals to perform [hand hygiene](#) when entering and leaving the debates and polling places.
- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60-90% alcohol content available at the venue including entrances and exits, and voting/debate rooms.
- Post handwashing and hand sanitizing posters in areas that can be clearly seen around the debate or polling places.
- Where possible, open windows and keep doors open to increase air flow.

## INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

- Provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to staff and volunteers, including medical masks and eye protection.
- Education and demonstration on the appropriate use of PPE should be reviewed with staff and volunteers.
- Encourage virtual training for election workers and candidates' representatives to limit the number of in-person interactions.
- Do not engage in any physical contact including handshakes.
- Provide staff and volunteers a location outside of the voting room when they need to remove their mask to eat, drink or take medication.
- Physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) must be maintained in break areas.
- Provide single-use items including ballot marking pens and secrecy folders. Encourage electors to bring their own pen or pencil.
- Digitize the voters' list and elector declarations to reduce touch points associated with statutory forms and processes.
- Amend voting place procedures to reduce touch points throughout the voting process and eliminate voting place staff touch points wherever possible.
- Avoid sharing or distributing pamphlets, buttons and other materials.
- Encourage staff/volunteers, attendees and voters to download and activate the [Government of Canada's COVID Alert exposure notification app](#).

## CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

- In addition to routine cleaning and disinfection, surfaces that are frequently touched with hands should be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as necessary to maintain a sanitary condition, as well as when visibly dirty.
  - Examples of frequently touches surfaces include, but are not limited to hand contact areas, door handles, switches, tabletops, chairs, handrails, restrooms, taps, and baby change tables.
- Use only disinfectants with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) given and [approved by Health Canada](#). Ensure products are not expired and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Equipment provided to or for use by electors, election workers, candidates, and candidates' representatives (e.g., microphones) must be cleaned and disinfected between use and as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.

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- For equipment, use only cleaning and disinfectant products that are intended for the object. Ensure products have a DIN, are not expired, and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Remove furniture that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected.
- Limit the use of water fountains to be used only to re-fill water bottles, not for individuals to drink directly from them. Ensure they are cleaned and disinfected as frequently as necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
- It is recommended to maintain logs of cleaning and disinfection.
- More guidance on cleaning and disinfection is provided by [Government of Canada](#) and [Public Health Ontario](#).
- While the risk of COVID-19 transmission through touching surfaces is low, it does occur. It is important to continue to follow infection control measures to reduce the various ways in which COVID-19 is spread. This includes appropriate cleaning and disinfection, as well as proper hand hygiene, masking, physical distancing, respiratory etiquette, and immunization.

## SIGNAGE

Sample signage to promote wearing masks/face coverings, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, capacity limits and physical distancing can be found [here](#).

## SUPPORTING EACH OTHER AND OUR COMMUNITY

We understand that this is a challenging time, but public health measures like this are needed to limit the spread of COVID-19. These additional measures that are put in place at electoral debates and polling places may result in delays. We appreciate all the efforts you are taking to help protect the community.

**Please contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's Health Connection line if you have any questions at 1-877-721-7520, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**

*While the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit aims to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to, nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional. No one should act, or refrain from acting, based solely upon the materials provided in this guidance, any hypertext links or other general information without first seeking appropriate legal or other professional advice. Please visit the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit website regularly for updates and additional guidance.*

## REFERENCES

Elections Canada (2021). Impact of COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.elections.ca/content2.aspx?section=faq&document=faqcov&lang=e>

Elections Canada (2020). Campaign guidance for canvassing during COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=pol&document=index&dir=can/pand&lang=e>

Film and Television Health and Safety Advisory Committee of the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (2021). Film and television industry health and safety during COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.filmsafety.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/S21-Film-Television-COVID19-Guidance-Revised-Jan.25.21-Final2.pdf>