

How to Vote Safely During the COVID-19 Pandemic

With appropriate precautions, voting in person carries little risk.

October 29, 2020 By [Liz Highleyman](#)

As Election Day approaches on November 3, it's too late to mail in your ballot and be sure that it will arrive in time and be counted. But fortunately, there are ways to safely vote in person in the midst of the pandemic.

A record number of people have already voted early this year, either by mail or in person at advance polling places. Many states expanded their use of absentee or mail ballots due to COVID-19, but rules vary about when they must be returned. In some states, election officials must receive your ballot by Election Day. In others, ballots that are postmarked by November 3 but arrive several days later will still be counted.

To be on the safe side, given recent slowdowns in mail delivery and ongoing [legal battles](#) about vote counting, election officials and advocates are now urging people to vote in person.

Given Supreme Court rulings on mail ballots and Trump's effort to undermine the Postal Service, I strongly suggest that you now vote in person - try early voting or find a drop box. Protect your health but don't let anyone deprive you of your most precious right.

Have a plan.

— Eric Holder (@EricHolder) [October 27, 2020](#)

The safest option is to fill out your ballot at home and drop it off. Some states make this easier than others. All states provide ballot drop boxes, but in some areas, these are [few and far between](#). Some areas encourage curbside ballot drop-offs that let you stay in your car, but [others prohibit them](#). Make sure to put your ballot in its official envelope, sign it and use a drop box that is labeled as an official ballot box.

Curbside voting in San FranciscoLiz Highleyman

You can also complete your ballot in person. Most states allow early voting, and millions of people nationwide have already taken advantage of this option—many of them facing long lines to do so. Time windows for early voting vary from state to state, but it typically ends a couple of days before Election Day.

If you wait until Election Day, you can drop off your completed mail ballot or vote in person at a polling station. Due to COVID-19, some polling places have been moved or consolidated, so check the location in advance. ([Vote.org](#) provides voting information for all states.)

Several precautions similar to those used for common activities such as grocery shopping can minimize the risk of coronavirus transmission while voting.

- Voters and poll workers should stay home if they are sick or have been in contact with a person with COVID-19.
- Wear a mask or other face covering while waiting in line and voting.

- Lines should form outside, rather than inside buildings.
- Keep windows and doors open to maximize ventilation.
- Voters and poll workers should maintain at least six feet of distance from one another.
- Voting booths should be placed at least six feet apart, or a limited number of people should be admitted at a time to allow for physical distancing.
- Foot traffic flow should be managed to avoid bottlenecks.
- If possible, avoid bringing nonvoters (such as children) to the polling place.
- Poll workers should use personal protective equipment and wash their hands often.
- Voters should wash their hands before and after voting.
- Hand sanitizer should be readily available for voters and poll workers.
- Voting booths and reusable equipment like pens should be disinfected frequently.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers [detailed guidance](#) for voters and poll workers. The Brennan Center for Justice and the Infectious Diseases Society of America have teamed up to issue [joint guidelines](#) to minimize the risk of COVID-19 at the polls.

During the Wisconsin primary in March, the media widely suggested that the people waiting in long lines to vote were endangering their health. However, [no rise in coronavirus cases](#) was linked to that election.

If your polling place is crowded indoors and mask use and physical distancing are not being enforced, the chances of coronavirus transmission increase. You may find shorter lines and smaller crowds if you vote in the late morning or midafternoon. Verify that your voter registration is current, and decide who you will vote for ahead of time so you can do so as quickly as possible.

In short, the risk of coronavirus transmission at an indoor polling place is no greater than the risk at a grocery store if people wear masks and maintain physical distance and the flow of movement is controlled to avoid crowding, according to George Rutherford, MD, a professor of epidemiology at the University of California, San Francisco.

“My greatest concern would be waiting in a long line that’s bunched together,” Rutherford [told the San Francisco Chronicle](#). “I don’t see much risk beyond that.”

[Click here](#) to learn more about COVID-19 prevention.