



STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR COVID PROTOCOL DURING CONDUCT OF LOCAL BODIES ELECTION IN THE U.T. OF PUDUCHERRY

**STATE ELECTION COMMISSION
PUDUCHERRY**

2021

“Every Vote Counts”



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STATE ELECTION COMMISSION, PUDUCHERRY

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Standard Operating Procedures for COVID Protocol During Conduct of Local Bodies Election in the U.T. of Puducherry.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) have been issuing guidelines from time to time to contain the pandemic in the Country. In this backdrop, the State Election Commission held a detailed discussion with senior officers and technical experts from the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Puducherry on 08.07.2021 to draw SOP for conduct of Civic Elections. The State Election Commission has considered the views and suggestions given by the Department and has drawn up Standard Operating Procedures as below.

1. General Guidelines:

1. Every person shall wear face mask during every election related activity.
2. Everyone shall compulsorily undergo thermal scanning and use soap/ sanitizer at the entry of rooms/ halls/ premises being used for Election related activity.
3. Social distance to be maintained as per COVID-19 guidelines of the Union Territory Government and Ministry of Home Affairs.
4. As far as possible large halls shall be identified and utilized for election related activities.

2. Election Store Room:

The election materials like forms and covers etc., shall be kept in a disinfected room. Only designated officials shall be permitted to enter the store room and they shall follow all COVID-19 precautionary measures.

3. Appointment & Training of Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers:

Training to all the Returning and Assistant Returning officers and officers inreserves shall be held in decentralized and phased manner forming small teams. As far as possible E-training/training through Video conferencing shall be arranged.

4. Nomination Process:

Returning Officers shall exercise the following COVID-19 guidelines while receiving nominations.

- 1) Returning and Assistant Returning Officers shall invariably wash their hands with soap / sanitizer and also wear face mask and hand gloves compulsorily.
- 2) While filing nominations, candidate or one proposer only shall enter the waiting room outside Returning Officers'/Assistant Returning Officers' office maintaining proper social distance (two meters / 6 feet). Either candidate or his proposer shall be permitted to enter the room of the Returning Officer. The next candidate shall be sent to the Returning officer's room only after the first candidate returns. All the candidates who reach the Returning Officer's room within the prescribed time shall be given tokens on first come first basis. Only those who enter the Returning Officers Room before the prescribed time limit shall be allowed to submit nominations.
- 3) A COVID positive patient shall submit nomination through his / her proposer.
- 4) Candidates should compulsorily wear face mask before entering the Returning Officer Office.

5. Scrutiny of Nominations:

Scrutiny of nominations shall be done constituency wise in front of the candidates. Either candidate or the proposer shall be present during scrutiny. The candidates shall compulsorily sanitize their hands, maintain social distance and wear facemask. On behalf of the COVID +ve candidate, his/her proposer can be allowed inside the hall.

6. Withdrawal of Nominations:

Candidate or his proposer/authorized agent shall be allowed to withdraw nomination and they shall sanitize their hands and compulsorily wear face mask, before entering the Returning Officers room. COVID +ve candidate shall give prior notice to the Returning Officer about the proposer/agent for withdrawal of nomination.

7. Allotment of Symbols:

The List of final candidates shall be prepared constituency wise and symbols shall be allotted accordingly. Candidates of concerned constituencies shall be permitted to be present in the hall. If the numbers of candidates are more, symbols shall be allotted as laid down in rules. If more than one candidate opts for the same symbol, then the symbol shall be allotted by lottery following social distancing norms.

8. Election Campaign:

- 1) The candidates can undertake house to house campaign with minimum (maximum-5) supporters, maintaining social distance during the campaign and they shall wear face mask without fail. As far as possible the priority should be given to the campaign through electronic media.
- 2) Candidates can use printed handbills for their campaign. While campaigning wearing face mask are compulsory.
- 3) In view of COVID-19 campaigning in large groups is not allowed.
- 4) COVID +ve candidates shall restrict their campaign through electronic media only and physical presence in campaign is not allowed.
- 5) Candidates can arrange meetings in the constituency strictly following all COVID-19 protocols.

9. Polling Station Arrangements:

- 1) Polling station and adjoining room shall be sanitized by spraying with 1% sodium hypochlorite.
- 2) Furniture shall be arranged in advance as per social distancing guidelines.
- 3) The polling personnel shall be given sanitized room adjoining the polling station for stay.
- 4) For distribution of identity slips by the candidates a separate place shall be identified in advance within 200 meters outside the polling station, where they can arrange tables, maintaining proper social distancing. The people

distributing identity slips shall take all necessary COVID-19 precautions.

10. Appointment of Polling Personnel and Training.

- 1) Separate/distinct ID No's shall be allotted for all the polling Officials/Staff so as to easily recognize them during training and mustering.
- 2) Training for the polling Officials/Staff has to be arranged in the same Taluk maintaining proper social distancing.
- 3) As far as practicable, E-training shall be arranged. Also, if the number of polling Officials/Staff is more, they shall be divided into batches of 50-100 and all COVID-19 SOP guidelines shall be strictly adhered to, while importing training physically.

11. Preparations for Mustering:

- 1) As mustering takes place on the previous day of voting, all preparations shall be done in advance. Route map to dispatch the poll parties to their respective destinations as per COVID guidelines shall be prepared.
- 2) The route map of polling stations allotted to each mustering centers shall be displayed in all the mustering centers.
- 3) The polling personnel shall be intimated of the allotted mustering centers.

12. Mustering:

- 1) On the day of mustering, it is mandatory for all the Officials/Staff to wear face masks.
- 2) On arrival of the polling Officials/Staff at the mustering center mandatory thermal checkup for fever shall be conducted and sanitizer shall be provided. After ensuring there is no COVID symptoms, they shall be allowed inside the mustering center. The assistance of Health department officials can be availed for this purpose.
- 3) A kit containing sanitizer, face masks and hand gloves (3-4 face masks, face shield and a pair of hand gloves) shall be provided to polling personnel.
- 4) Proper social distancing shall be ensured while distributing materials to the polling personnel.

- 5) Polling parties shall travel only in the vehicles assigned to them. Care shall be taken not to overcrowd any vehicle.

13. Process on Polling Day:

- 1) **Polling Officials and Polling Agents:** On the day of poll all Polling officials and agents shall compulsorily wear face mask/face shield and hand gloves and strictly adhere to all COVID-19 precautions.
- 2) **Voters:** Wearing face mask and maintaining proper social distancing is mandatory for voters.
- 3) The Officials or Staffs or Volunteers shall be appointed to each polling stations, for providing sanitizer and thermal scanning of all the voters and polling officials/agents and to ensure that everyone entering the polling station is wearing mask. If anyone is found having COVID-19 symptoms, they shall be immediately sent to the nearest health center for further examinations. If separate teams are formed for this purpose there will be no hindrance for polling activities.
- 4) Polling agents shall reach the polling station well in time and occupy the seat earmarked for them.
- 5) The Presiding Officer shall not allow people to overcrowd and ensure social distancing inside the polling station at all times and start the polling process in time.

14. Entry of Voter and Voting Procedures:

- 1) Each voter before entering the Polling station shall strictly adhere to all COVID-19 protocols.
- 2) A separate queue shall be maintained for male and female voters.
- 3) After examining the identity slip, the voter shall be informed to drop the voter slip in the box earmarked for the purpose.
- 4) Separate orders for the voting of COVID +ve patients will be issued.
- 5) **Applying Indelible Ink:** The Polling Officers shall wear the hand gloves and shall carefully apply the ink without physical contact. If the voter is wearing the hand gloves, the Polling Officers shall be asked to remove it and then apply the ink to the proper finger.

- 6) **Closure of Polling:** Immediately after the completion of the polling, Presiding Officer shall seal the EVM machine and along with statutory documents shall return in the vehicle, maintaining proper social distancing.

15. Setting up of de-mustering Center, Strong Room and Counting Center:

- 1) Large halls shall be identified keeping in mind the de-mustering activity, strong room facility and counting activity to ensure social distancing.
- 2) To avoid overcrowding, district administration shall identify multiple de-mustering / counting centers in the Taluk headquarters.
- 3) Strong room has to be disinfected before and after keeping the sealed EVM Machines and statutory covers. Care shall be taken not to cause any damage to EVM machines and other documents while disinfecting.

16. De-mustering:

- 1) Large gathering in the de-mustering centers shall be avoided and proper social distancing measures shall be under taken.
- 2) De-mustering Staff and Polling Officers shall invariably wear face mask and hand gloves during the process.

17. Preparation of the Counting Center:

- 1) The identified rooms/halls for counting have to be disinfected on the previous day of counting and necessary arrangements shall be made properly before sealing it.
- 2) During the counting process either the candidate or his/her authorized agent shall be allowed to sit inside the counting hall.
- 3) Counting activity shall be done strictly following COVID-19 guidelines. Guidelines for counting will be issued separately.
- 4) Large gatherings outside the counting center shall be prohibited.

18. COVID-19 precautionary notices in counting center:

COVID-19 precaution notices shall be conspicuously displayed outside the counting center. Those who do not follow the instructions shall be sent outside the counting center immediately and the power to take suitable action against

those who violate the instructions shall be with the Returning Officer.

19. Appointment of counting staff:

- 1) The Counting Supervisors and Assistants shall be appointed and trained well in advance taking all COVID-19 precautions.
- 2) After the completion of counting, the sealed trunks shall be handed over to the concerned authority to be kept in the strong room provided for the purpose.

20. Arranging light refreshments:

Light refreshments has to be arranged separately for the counting officials/staff, candidates and their agents, taking all COVID-19 precautionary measures. Care shall be taken to maintain cleanliness.

21. Entry to the Counting Hall:

Health department officials shall be appointed to thermal scan of counting officials/agents and to ensure that everyone entering the counting hall is wearing mask.

Counting supervisors and counting staff shall compulsorily wear face mask, face shield and hand gloves while counting.

The seating arrangement for the counting staff, candidates and agents shall be made following COVID-19 guidelines. Candidates and the agents entering the counting hall shall compulsorily wear the face mask.

- 1) The winning candidates shall be given winning certificates and handshaking is prohibited.
- 2) Large gathering and procession by the winning candidates is prohibited.

22. Electronic Voting Machines: The following measures shall be followed while using EVMs.

- 1) Large halls shall be identified for FLC and randomization of EVMs. The EVM storage room shall be sanitized with 1% sodium Hypochlorite solution and proper care shall be taken to avoid any damage to the EVMs during this process. Hand gloves shall be provided to handle EVMs.
- 2) During the candidate set activity the officials and candidates present shall compulsorily follow the COVID-19 guidelines of maintaining social distancing, wearing mask and hand gloves.

Annexure-1

In view of COVID-19 pandemic, the Officials / Staff and general public taking part in the Local body elections shall take the following precautionary measures.

1. Greet without physical contact.
2. Maintaining physical distance.
3. Wear reusable face cover or face masks.
4. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
5. Washing hands frequently and thoroughly.
6. Maintain respiratory hygiene.
7. Do not chew tobacco, pan masala / Khaini etc., and spit in the public places.
8. Surfaces which are frequently used shall be regularly sanitized.
9. Avoid unnecessary travel.
10. Do not discriminate against anyone.
11. Discourage crowd – encourage safety.
12. Do not circulate social media posts which carry unverified or negative information.
13. Seek information of COVID-19 from credible sources.
14. Seek psychosocial support for any stress or anxiety.
