Recommended Precautions for Preventing Spread of COVID-19 in Election Polling Locations, including Cleaning and Disinfection

Background

There is much to learn about the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Based on what is currently known about SARS-CoV-2 and similar coronaviruses, spread from person-to-person with these viruses happens most frequently among close contacts (within about 6 feet). This type of transmission occurs via respiratory droplets. On the other hand, transmission of SARS-CoV-2 to persons from surfaces contaminated with the virus has not been documented. Transmission of coronavirus occurs much more commonly through respiratory droplets than through contact with contaminated surfaces. Current evidence suggests that SARS-CoV-2 may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials. Cleaning of visibly dirty surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice measure for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses in election polling locations.

Purpose

This guidance provides recommendations on the routine cleaning and disinfection of polling location areas and associated electronic equipment (e.g., voting machines and computers). It suggests actions that polling station workers can take to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 by limiting the survival of the virus in the environment. This guidance will be updated if additional information becomes available.

Definitions:
- *Community settings* (e.g. polling locations, households, schools, daycares, businesses) encompass most non-healthcare settings and are visited by the general public.

- *Cleaning* refers to the removal of dirt and impurities including germs from surfaces. Cleaning alone does not kill germs. But by removing them, it decreases the number of germs and therefore any risk of spreading infection.

- *Disinfecting* kills germs on surfaces. Disinfecting works by using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs. But killing germs remaining on a surface after cleaning further reduce any risk of spreading infection.

Preventive action polling workers can take
- **Stay at home if you have fever, respiratory symptoms, or believe you are sick**.
- **Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces:** including tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.
- **Disinfect surfaces that may be contaminated with germs after cleaning:** a list of products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims, maintained by the

American Chemistry Council Center for Biocide Chemistries (CBC), is available at: https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf. Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims are expected to be effective against the virus that causes COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, and use of personal protective equipment). Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.

- **Practice hand hygiene frequently**: wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- **Clean and disinfect voting associated electronics (e.g., voting machines, laptops, tablets, keyboards) routinely using products with the EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims (examples can be found here: this link).** Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.
  - Consult with the voting machine manufacturer about guidance on products appropriate for disinfecting voting machines and touch screens, and consider additional use of wipeable covers for machines if possible.
  - If no guidance is available, consider the use of alcohol-based wipes or spray containing at least 70% alcohol to clean voting machine buttons and touch screens. Use of alcohol-based products may reduce risk of damage to sensitive voting machine components.

Preventive action polling stations workers can take for themselves and the general public
Based on available data, the most important measures to prevent transmission of viruses in crowded public areas include careful and consistent cleaning of one's hands. Therefore:
- **Ensure bathrooms at the polling station are supplied adequately with soap, water, and drying materials so visitors and staff can wash their hands**.
- P**rovide an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol** for use before or after using the voting machine or the final step in the voting process. Consider placing the alcohol-based hand sanitizer in visible, frequently used locations such as registration desks and exits.

References

Community Mitigation Guidance for COVID-19 Response in the United States: Nonpharmaceutical Interventions for Community Preparedness and Outbreak Response
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/preparing-individuals-communities.html

Handwashing: Clean Hands Save Lives
https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html