



## **GUIDANCE FOR TOWN MEETINGS TO ADDRESS**

### **COVID-19**

**As of November 23, 2020**

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#### **Purpose**

These sector specific COVID-19 safety recommendations for Town Meetings are issued to provide municipalities with instructions to help protect against the spread of COVID-19 as in-person meetings resume.

These standards are advisory only and are not exclusive or exhaustive. The public health data for disease prevention upon which these guidelines are based can and does change frequently.

#### **General Standards**

These standards apply to all town meetings.

Town officials should communicate to residents that if they are feeling sick, are exhibiting any of the following symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell), or have potentially been exposed to someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, then they should not attend town meeting in person. A potential exposure means having household contact or having close contact (within 6 feet) with an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 for prolonged periods of time (over 15 minutes) while the person is symptomatic or 48 hours before symptoms developed.

Persons who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 according to the Centers for Disease Control (e.g., due to age or underlying conditions) are encouraged to stay home.

Town officials are encouraged, to the extent feasible, to hold meetings virtually or outdoors and to ensure that attendees are spaced at least 6 feet apart. If outdoor meetings are not feasible, towns are advised to abide by the following policies in conducting town meeting.

#### **1. Attendance**

- Hosting town meeting by remote participation and reduction of quorum as allowed by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2020, is strongly encouraged including:
- Voting to set the number of voters necessary to constitute a quorum at any town meeting held during the Governor's March 10, 2020 declaration of a state of emergency at a number that is less than the number that would otherwise be required by law, town by-law or town charter; provided, however, that the number of voters necessary to constitute a quorum shall not be less than 10 per cent of the number that would otherwise be required;
- Remote participation, including, but not limited to, by means of a video or telephone conferencing platform, if the moderator in a town having a representative town meeting determines that it is not possible to safely assemble the town meeting members and interested members of the public in a common location while complying with any applicable state or local orders; and,

- Voting to hold town meeting outside the geographic limits of the town if the select board or board of selectmen determines that it is not possible to adequately conduct town meeting in a location within the town in a manner that ensures health and safety.
- Attendees of town meeting should sign in as they would normally do. Town staff should ensure that they have the correct contact information for attendees, to permit contact tracing if required.

## II. Social Distancing

### Seating

- Seating should be arranged to permit attendees to sit at least 6 feet apart. Members of the same immediate household may be allowed to sit together and less than 6 feet apart
- If there is fixed seating, rows should be blocked off and kept empty to allow for sufficient distancing between rows
- Town officials are encouraged to place tape or other visual distancing markings on seating to delineate 6 ft separations and to post signage indicating the maximum number of persons permitted per row
- Promote ventilation for enclosed spaces where possible. For example, open windows and doors to allow airflow
- Lines at microphones for questions or comments should be taped to keep people six feet apart. Microphones should be disinfected after each speaker

### Entering and Exiting

- Town meetings are advised to take steps to encourage orderly entering and exiting of meetings in a manner that encourages social distancing. For example:
  - Signage or floor markings should be posted to have one-way aisles or otherwise direct attendees to follow certain pathways for entering and exiting the meetings
  - If a line forms outside of the meeting, those waiting should be directed to maintain social distancing. Tape or other markings on the ground outside of the meeting should be placed to encourage attendees to maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet
  - Staff should direct people in high traffic areas to help maintain social distancing
  - Town officials or other staff should direct successive, row-by-row exiting

## III. Face Coverings

- All residents over the age of 5 and staff must wear face coverings or masks in accordance with COVID-19 Order No. 31 and the Department of Public Health's Guidance while inside and while entering and exiting locations of town meeting or otherwise participating in in-person meetings, except where a person is unable to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition
- A person who declines to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or disabling condition shall not be required to produce documentation verifying the condition
- Individuals addressing town meeting may remove his or her face covering while doing so, provided that he or she is able to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other persons present.
- Installation of protective, plexi-glass or other transparent barriers are recommended for podiums and other points of address
- Towns are strongly advised not to arrange for or permit communal gathering pre or post

meeting (e.g., coffee or other food services)

**IV. Cleaning and Disinfecting and Hygiene Protocols**

- Locations of meetings shall be cleaned and disinfected before and after each meeting, including disinfection of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, bathrooms, microphones, shared instruments)
- Markings should be placed outside of bathrooms to adhere to the 6 ft distance between each attendee
- If town meeting officials learn that an individual with COVID-19 attended a meeting or otherwise entered the building, the town should conduct a deep cleaning and disinfecting of any areas visited by the infected individual consistent with the Centers for Disease Control guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>
- Town meeting officials should ensure that officials and residents have access to handwashing facilities, including soap and running water, and allow workers sufficient break time to wash hands, as necessary. They are also encouraged to make alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol available, if possible
- Town Warrants and other paper that is distributed at a meeting should be done so in a manner to ensure social distancing and not be shared between attendees Towns that use electronic voting machines should disinfect the machine between each use

**V. Notification of Positive Case**

- Town meeting officials should work with the board of health in the event that anyone is exposed to COVID-19 at the meeting. Meeting attendees may need to be identified and contacted by the board of health or Contact Tracing Collaborative.