



**Conduct of General
Elections/Bye-elections
during
COVID
Revised Broad Guidelines
2022**



ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

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Election Commission of India, on 21st August 2020, had issued "Broad guidelines for conduct of General Elections/Bye-elections during COVID-19". The General Elections to legislative assemblies of Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, West Bengal and Puducherry were conducted accordingly. The Commission had also issued further instructions, from time to time, in view of the emerging COVID circumstances and advisories issued by Ministry of Home Affairs and MoHFW.

2. **Article 172(1) of the Constitution of India** states that the term of the legislative assembly shall be five years from the date of its first meeting. The term of state assemblies of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur is due to expire starting from 15.3.2022. The relevant provisions of The Representation of Peoples Act, 1950, and The Representation of Peoples Act, 1951 govern the electoral process.
3. **Commission held consultations with all National and State Political parties** in all the poll going states who suggested that elections should be held in time while enforcing the covid appropriate behavior.
4. **Commission also held consultations with Union Home Secretary, Union Health Secretary and Medical experts, Chief Secretaries and Health Secretaries of all poll going states regarding prevailing covid situation and measures being taken/ planned by them.**
5. **The safety of vote and voters**, both are equally and critically important in the democracy. Therefore, it is duty of the Commission to fulfil its constitutional mandate and those of Authorities/ Committee(s) under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM Act) to extend support as per legal and institutional framework to steer elections even during unprecedented pandemic for putting elected government in place within due time.
6. **The Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM Act)** provides for the effective management of disaster(s) and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. A comprehensive institutional regime has been set up under the DM Act with National Disaster Management Authority (**NDMA**) at the Apex level u/s 3(1), National Executive Committee (**NEC**) u/s 8(1), State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) u/s 14(1), State Executive Committee (**SEC**) headed by the Chief Secretary of the State u/s 20(1) and the District Disaster Management Authority headed by District Magistrate u/s 25(2a). The DM Act mandates and makes such designated Authorities/Committee(s) responsible to prepare plan; prescribe regulatory/ mitigation regime and enforcement thereof; seek community/ inter agency coordination and to monitor implementation of the prescribed directions to contain, mitigate, control damage and providing assistance to the effected persons. The DM Act also empowers the designated authorities/ Committee(s) to take appropriate legal/ punitive action against violators of its directions u/s 51-60 of the Act.
7. Commission, after briefing by the Chairperson of the NEC and the Chairpersons of the SECs of the five poll going states, took note of the action being taken from time to time by such designated authorities / Committee(s) under the legal / institutional mechanism created by the DM Act, 2005. With respect to the

pandemic caused by Covid 19 and subsequent variants of the same, implementation of the Covid appropriate behavior as per the regime prescribed by such designated Authorities / Committee(s) assumes criticality during the electoral process. In view of Variant of Concern (VOC) named as Omicron notified by MoHFW and the prevailing situation, the Commission has examined its existing guidelines and hereby, in supersession of all its earlier guidelines on the subject, further revises/ modifies its broad guidelines comprehensively **to complement and not repeat not to substitute** the mandate/ responsibility of the Authorities/ Committee(s) under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM Act).

8. The Commission directs that during electoral process Chief Secretary at State level and District Magistrate at District level, shall be primarily responsible for monitoring, supervision and strict enforcement of these COVID guidelines and the guidelines issued by NDMA and respective SDMA/DDMA, whichever is more stringent.

Details of the broad guidelines are as follows:

I. Campaign by the political parties/contesting candidates/Others

1. It is expected that all stakeholders namely political parties, candidates, campaigners, voters and authorities engaged in the election process shall always be conscious of their prime duty towards public health / safety and therefore shall abide by these general instructions and other norms of Covid appropriate behavior as mandated by the respective authorities prescribed under the law.
2. **No road show, Pad-yatra, cycle/bike/vehicle rally and procession** shall be allowed till 15 January, 2022. Commission shall subsequently review the situation and issue further instructions accordingly.
3. **No physical rally** of Political parties or probable candidates or any other group related to election shall be allowed till 15 January, 2022. Commission shall subsequently review the situation and issue further instructions accordingly.
4. **However, physical rallies during the campaign period, as and when permitted after the decision of the Commission** shall be conducted subject to adherence to extant COVID-19 guidelines. **The maximum limit of persons allowed for Indoor and outdoor** rally/meeting shall be as per existing direction of respective SDMAs. For these meetings political parties shall distribute masks and sanitizers to persons attending and maintain COVID protocol at entry and exit point.
5. District Election Officer should take following steps for this purpose:
 - I. District Election Officer should, in advance, identify dedicated grounds for public gathering with clearly marked Entry/Exit points.
 - II. In all such identified grounds, the District Election Officer should ensure that markers for social distancing norms are put in place in advance by organisers of the meeting/rally.
 - III. District Election Officer and District Superintendent of Police should ensure that the number of attendees do not exceed the limit prescribed by State Disaster Management Authority for public gatherings. DEO should depute Nodal Health officers to oversee that

COVID-19 instructions/guidelines are followed during these meetings.

- IV. The political parties and candidates concerned shall ensure that all COVID-19 related requirement like face masks, sanitizers, thermal scanning etc. are fulfilled during each of election related activities.
6. Further, rallies and meeting shall be allowed **only in earmarked places** and with prior permissions of district administration.
7. **Each political party/candidate shall furnish an undertaking** in the application form (under Suvidha) that it shall abide by all the extant instructions/guidelines in this regard.
8. Allocation of public spaces must be done using Suvidha app in the manner already prescribed by Commission.
9. **Between 8 pm and 8 am no rallies and public meetings (akin to campaign curfew)** shall be allowed on any_campaign_day.
10. **Nukkad Sabhas (meeting) will not be allowed** on public roads, roundabouts or public streets or corners.
11. Further, Political parties and candidates are advised to conduct their **campaign as much as possible through digital/virtual/ media platforms /mobile based mode** instead of physical mode ensuring strict compliance of Covid safety norms.
12. **Door to Door Campaign-** A maximum of 5 (five) persons including candidate, excluding security personnel, if any, shall be allowed to do door to door campaigning.
13. **The convoy of vehicles shall be broken after every 5** (five) vehicles and interval between two sets of convoys of vehicles should be half an hour instead of gap of 100 meters. (In supersession of Para 5.8.1of Returning Officer's Handbook 2019). During the permitted campaign period, convoy of vehicles will be allowed only for movement of vehicle from one point to another point for campaigning.
14. **The maximum number of star campaigners** for recognized National/State political parties has been fixed 30 in place of 40, for unrecognized political parties 15 in place of 20. Request for permission for campaign by star campaigners may be given at least 48 hours before the start of campaign to make all necessary safety arrangements.
15. **No victory procession** after the counting shall be allowed and not more than two persons shall be allowed to accompany the winning candidate or his/her authorized representative to receive the certificate of election from Returning Officer.
16. **If a candidate or political party violates any of the above guidelines**, no further permission shall be given to the concerned candidate/party for rallies, meetings etc.
17. The Commission on 29th December, 2021 has directed Secretary, MoHFW to issue direction to treat all eligible govt. officials, deployed/engaged for elections, at par with Front Line Workers (FLWs) in the poll going states and to give them additional precaution dose of COVID-19.

- II. **General Guidelines to be followed during entire election processes for all persons**
18. All person involved with the electoral process shall **wear face mask** during the concerned election related activities.
 19. **Social distancing norms** shall be strictly abided by all persons connected with election related activities as per the extant COVID guidelines of the State Govt. and Ministry of Home Affairs.
 20. All Polling Personnel/Security Personnel/Counting Staff shall be doubly vaccinated before deploying/engaging in election related activities.
 21. No Polling Agent/ Counting Agent etc. allowed to enter Counting hall/polling station without doubly vaccination.
 22. No person shall be allowed to enter Counting hall without double vaccination and if they are not vaccinated/single vaccinated, RT-PCR/RAT from authorized lab will be required within 48 hours from start of polling/counting.
 23. At the **entry of hall/ room/ premises** used for election purposes:
 - **Thermal Scanning** of all persons shall be carried out;
 - **Sanitizer** shall be made available on all entry points.
 24. As far as practicable, large halls should be identified and utilized to ensure social distancing norms.
 25. Adequate number of vehicles shall be mobilized for movement of polling personnel, security personnel to ensure compliance of COVID-19 guidelines.
 26. Create awareness among the public for COVID appropriate behavior including self-monitoring.
 27. **Nodal Health Officer:** Nodal Health Officer shall be designated for the State Level, the District Level and the Assembly Constituency Level to oversee COVID related arrangements and, preventive measures during entire electoral process.
 28. **EVMs/VVPATs**
 - i. First & Second randomization and preparation of EVMs/VVPATs shall be done in large halls.
 - ii. Sanitizers shall be provided in sufficient quantity for use during the process.
 - iii. Gloves shall be made available to each official handling EVM/VVPAT.
 29. **Election Material:** Election Material Kit will be prepared in a spacious and sufficiently large hall following all safety, sanitation and social distancing measures.
 30. **Distribution and Collection of Election Material**
 - i. Large halls/spaces should be identified for distribution/collection of election material.
 - ii. As far as practicable, it should be organized in decentralized manner.
 - iii. Prior time should be allocated to the polling teams for distribution/collection of election material.

31 Timing of 3rd randomization of Polling Staff:

Timing for 3rd randomization of polling staff be increased **from 24 hrs to 72 hrs.** in order to avoid large gathering of polling staff at dispatch centres.

(This is in supersession of **ECI No. 464/Inst/2008/EPS dated 19th September, 2008**)

32. Kit for Polling Officer

The following items shall be provided to every polling official and security personnel (Other than those where PPEs are needed) in addition to other prescribed items:

- i. Mask
- ii. Sanitizer
- iii. Face-Shield
- iv. Gloves

33. Training and capacity Building

- i. As far as practicable, training of election officials will be organized in decentralized manner at large halls.
- ii. Training for election officials may be organized through online mode.
- iii. All PPTs, training materials, relevant documents, topic wise video clips, question papers for self-assessment may be uploaded in app/ portal so that any election official can access it as per requirement.
- iv. Sufficient number of Polling/Counting/Poll related staffs shall also be kept in reserve by DEO/RO, to replace in case any polling personnel displays COVID-19 symptoms.

34. Nomination Process Following additional options to facilitate online mode are hereby provided:

- i. Nomination form will also be available online on the website of CEO/DEO. An intending candidate may fill in it online and its print may be taken for submitting before the Returning Officer as specified in Form-1 (Rule-3 of Conduct of Election Rules 1961).
- ii. Affidavit may also be filled in online on the website of CEO/DEO and its print can be taken and after notarization it may be submitted along with the nomination form before the Returning Officer.
- ii. Candidate may deposit security money through **online mode** at the designated platform. However, a candidate will continue to have the option of deposit in cash in the treasury.
- iv. Candidate may have the option to seek his/her elector certification for the purpose of nomination online.
- v. Number of persons to accompany candidate for submission of Nomination is restricted to two (2). (This is in supersession of 5 (five))

as per the existing **Para 5.8.1of Returning Officer’s Handbook 2019**).

- i. Maximum number of vehicles for the purposes of nomination is restricted to two (2) (This is in supersession of the existing **Para 5.8.1of Returning Officer’s Handbook 2019**)
- ii. Returning Officer’s chamber should have sufficient space to perform the functions of nomination, scrutiny and symbol allocation following social distancing norms.
- ii. Returning Officer should allot staggered time in advance to prospective candidates.
- x. Large space for waiting for candidate(s) should be arranged.
- x. All steps required to be taken for the submission of nomination form and affidavit shall continue to operate as per the provisions contained in the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

35. **No. of electors in Polling Station**

There shall be maximum 1250 electors instead of 1500 electors in a polling station.

36. **Polling Station Arrangements**

Commission has issued detailed instructions for assured minimum facilities at each polling station. Now, in view of COVID situation, following additional facilities/steps should be taken:

- i. Mandatory sanitization of Polling Station, preferably, a day before the poll.
- ii. Thermal Scanner at the entry point of every polling station location.
- iii. Thermal Checking of voters at entry point of polling station location/Polling station, either by polling staff or Para Medical staff or Asha worker.
- iv. **If temperature is above the set norms of MoH&FW at first reading, then it will be checked twice and if it remains, then the elector shall be provided with token/certificate and will be asked to come for voting at the last hour of poll. At the last hour of poll, such electors shall be facilitated voting, strictly following COVID-19 related preventive measures.**
- v. Help Desk for distribution of token to the voters of first come first basis so that they do not wait in the queue.
- vi. Marker to demonstrate social distancing for queue.
- vii. Earmarking circle for 15-20 persons of 2 yards (6 feet) distance for voters standing in the queue depending on the availability of space. There shall be three queues each, for male, female, and PwD/ Senior citizen voters.
- viii. The services of BLOs, volunteers etc may be engaged to monitor and regulate social distancing norms strictly.
- ix. One shaded waiting areas with chairs, dari etc. will be provided, for male and female separately, within the polling station premises so that voters can participate in voting without safety concerns.

- x. Wherever possible, Booth App shall be used at the polling station.
- xi. **Sanitizer** should be provided at the entry/exit point of every polling station.
- xii. **Face Masks** in reserves for those electors who are not carrying the mask will be kept.
- xiii. Awareness posters on COVID should be displayed at visible locations.
- xiv. Sitting arrangement in polling station for the polling personnel and polling agents shall be made as per the norms of social distancing.
- xv. If polling agent or counting agent is having temperature above the prescribed limit, then their reliever shall be allowed by Presiding Officer, who will keep a record accordingly.
- xvi. During the process of identification of voter, the voters will require to lower the facemask for identification, when required.
- xvii. At any given time, only 1(one) voter shall be allowed to stand in front of each polling official maintaining social distance.
- xviii. Hand gloves shall be provided to the voter, for signing on the voter register and pressing button of EVM for voting.
- xix. Sanitizers shall be kept inside the booth at appropriate locations with clear direction for the use by voters.
- xx. COVID patients and all other who may be under quarantine will be allowed to cast their vote **at the last hour of the poll day** at their respective Polling Stations, under the supervision of health authorities, strictly following COVID-19 related preventive measures. Sector Magistrates shall coordinate this activity in their allocated polling stations.

37. **Postal Ballot**

Option of Postal Ballot facility has been extended to the electors of following categories:

- i. Electors who are flagged as Persons with Disabilities (PWD) and who are having benchmark disabilities.
- ii. Electors above the age of 80 years
- iii. Electors employed in notified essential services
- iv. Electors who are COVID positive/suspect and in quarantine (home/institutional)

38. **Strong-room Arrangement**

- I. Strong Room should be sanitized before the storage of polled EVMs.
- II. Social Distancing and other safety norms shall be followed for each activity.

39. **Counting of votes**

- At entry of Counting Hall there must be facility of Thermal Scanning and Sanitizer.
 - Counting Centers shall be disinfected before and after the counting.
 - Counting Hall be sufficiently big to maintain social distancing, proper ventilation, windows, exhaust fan etc.
 - Anyone, even after double vaccinated, having any symptom of COVID like fever, Cold etc. will not be allowed in Counting hall.
 - Every Counting Official and Security personnel be provided with Mask, Sanitizer, Face-Shield and Hand Gloves.
- I. Not more than 7 counting tables should be allowed in a counting hall. Hence, counting of votes of a constituency may be considered at 3-4 halls by appointing additional Assistant Returning Officers. (In supersession of instructions dated 30th April, 2014)
- II. The counting centers shall be disinfected before, during and after the counting.
- III. For counting of Postal Ballots, additional number of AROs may be required. If required, Postal Ballots may also be counted in a separate hall under the supervision of the Returning Officer/Assistant Returning officer.
- i. DEO shall appoint a Nodal Officer at each Counting Centre to ensure compliance of COVID guidelines with assistance of Nodal Health Officer and Compliance Certificate in r/o Counting Centre arrangement as per COVID guidelines from Health Authorities be taken.
 - ii. List of counting agents be made available by candidates to RO by 1700 hours on day three days prior to counting.
 - iii. No public gathering outside the counting venue during process of counting.
 - iv. Candidate may appoint/replace counting agents in case report is positive.

Needless to add that anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures will be liable to be proceeded against as per the provisions of Section 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the IPC, and other legal provisions as applicable, as specified in Order No. 40-3/2020-DM-I(A) dated 29th July, 2020 of Ministry of Home Affairs. District Election Officer should bring this to the notice of all concerned.

Further , the Chief Secretary cum Ex officio chairperson of the State Executive Committee under section 20 of the DM Act, 2005 shall , as and when required and as per the evolving/ contextual needs of the State, at

once bring to the notice of the Commission any new trend, development / situation that is not covered by these **broad guidelines for General Elections** and warrants Commission's intervention during the electoral process in the state so as to enable Commission to issue further appropriate instructions with respect to electoral process and thereby complementing the mandate/ efforts of the State Executive Committee in containing/ managing the spread of pandemic.

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