



Document: Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation (SBAR)
Topic: Federal election voting
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Submitted by: CoVaRR-Net
To: Elections Canada

Recommendations

- **Mail-in voting:**
 - Encourage alternative options to in-person voting such as voting by mail.
 - Provide an education and outreach campaign (e.g. media printed, broadcasting, public service announcements, and social media) to address potential lack of information about how to vote by mail (1).
 - Target voter education to senior citizens or first-time voters who may require more assistance in the process of mail in voting (1).
- **In-person voting:**
 - Ensure polling stations are located in well ventilated buildings. Block the use of polling stations in schools. If polling stations are located in public schools, allow children to stay home from school. Ensure voters move in one direction (one set of entry and exit doors).
 - Increase outdoor queuing (weather permitting), offer curbside voting or priority queues for vulnerable individuals.
 - Encourage early voting and extend voting hours during the day.
 - Encourage voters to wear face masks, ensure 2 meters minimum distance between voters, encourage hand sanitization, and sanitize polling stations every half hour.

Situation

A federal election has been called for September 20, 2021 in Canada amidst a pandemic and the fourth wave of COVID-19. This SBAR along with an accompanying one entitled “Federal election campaign” explores approaches taken during provincial elections, as well as other national elections (e.g., US), during the pandemic, and make policy recommendations to ensure the safety of the public and the candidates. The first SBAR of this two-part series focuses on how political parties can campaign safely across the country over the month of September. This second SBAR focuses on how Elections Canada can safely collect ballots from Canadians during a pandemic.



Background

- Canada's Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam declared a fourth wave of COVID-19, largely driven by the more transmissible Delta variant (2). Provincial public health measures vary across the country and are summarized in Appendix A.
- Health and safety measures have been adopted by almost all countries running elections during COVID-19 and were similar across countries (3). Several provincial elections have been held throughout COVID-19 in Canada including in Nova Scotia, Yukon, Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and New Brunswick. Appendix B summarizes COVID-19 precautions each election took.
- Most countries employed two general intervention themes (3,4):
 - Reduce congregation of in-person voters by increasing voting alternatives.
 - Reduce transmission risk among in-person voters, poll workers and other facility users (e.g., physical barriers and guides, health and sanitation measures, modified layout and procedure at polling facility, line management). Note that although other themes were used (such as lengthening the voting period for in-person voters), these two interventions were the most consistent.
- According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, there has been little evidence linking voting arrangements with community transmission (as of February 2021), concluding that public health interventions before and on election day(s) were generally effective (3).
- Elections Canada must administer programs in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as the Canada Elections Act (5).
- Bill C-19 was passed in May of 2021 to amend the Canada Elections Act in response to COVID-19 (6). This enactment provides temporary rules to ensure the safe administration of an election in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Briefly, this amendment expands the previous regulations by:
 - Extending the Chief Electoral Officer's power to provide adaptations that ensure the health and safety of electors or election officers.
 - Authorizing a returning officer to constitute polling divisions that consist of a single institution or part of an institution where seniors or persons with a disability reside.
 - Extending the polling period to three consecutive days consisting of a Saturday, Sunday and Monday, as opposed to only one day, which typically occurs during a federal election.
 - Allowing for alteration to the hours of polling period, opening and closing measures at polling stations, and to increase the number of days for voting at advance polling stations.
 - Providing expansions on special ballot voting.
 - Note that provincial and territorial COVID-19 public safety requirements (such as masking) will be enforced in the spaces leased to Elections Canada. However, electors who cannot wear a mask for medical reasons will not be required to wear one, nor will they be asked for proof of medical exemption (7).



- A survey commissioned by Elections Canada in 2020 found the majority (58%) of all voters would still opt to vote in-person at either a polling station on election day or at an Elections Canada office in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic environment (8).

Assessment

- Despite the drop in public health restrictions by many jurisdictions in Canada, the likelihood of high numbers of in-person voters during a fourth wave of COVID-19 warrants stringent public safety measures during the administration of the federal election.

Appendix A: Summary of Current Public Health Measures Per Province as of August 30, 2021

Province	Current Public Health Measures
BC (9,10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: required in all public indoor settings for all people 12+ • Personal gatherings: no restrictions on indoor or outdoor events • Organized gatherings: indoor capacity of 50 people or 50%, whichever is greater. Outdoor capacity of 5,000 people or 50%, whichever is greater • Fitness: all outdoor and indoor sports for adults/youth are allowed at normal capacity • Restaurants/bars: no group limit for indoor or outdoor dining. No dancing or socializing between tables. Liquor sales return to regular hours. • LTC: no visitor limit; however, visitors should be fully vaccinated for at least 7 days prior to visiting. Will need to show online or paper immunization record. • Self-isolation: close contacts are identified and may not be required to isolate if they are fully vaccinated or have already had COVID-19. <p>Note: Regional restrictions are in place for Interior BC</p>
AB (11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: not required in public indoor settings except when in LTC or on public transit • Personal gatherings: no public health measures • Organized gatherings: no public health measures • Fitness: no public health measures • Restaurants/bars: no public health measures • LTC: no limit to the number of visitors; however, visitors must undergo a health screening when entering the building. • Self-isolation: COVID-10 positive individuals must isolate for 10 days. Isolation is voluntary for close contacts (unless in a LTC setting)
SK (12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: not required in public indoor settings • Personal gatherings: no public health measures • Organized gatherings: no public health measures • Fitness: no public health measures • Restaurants/bars: no public health measures • LTC: no limit to the number of visitors; however, visitors must undergo a health screening upon entry. Masks are recommended for visitors. • Self-isolation: self-isolation is voluntary for COVID-19 positive individuals and close contacts. Unvaccinated close contacts in schools may still be asked to self-isolate.
MB (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: not required in public indoor settings • Personal gatherings: no public health measures • Organized gatherings: indoor capacity of 50 people or 50%, whichever is greater. Outdoor have a capacity of 1,500 people or if the outdoor venue has a capacity limit, the allowed capacity is 50 per cent or 150 people, whichever is greater.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness: no public health measures • Restaurants/bars: No group or capacity limits for indoor or outdoor dining. Tables no longer required to be separated, but guests cannot dance or socialize between tables. • LTC: number of visitors still limited; visitors must undergo a health screening upon entry. Must show proof of full vaccination to visit residents in their room. Masks are required for visitors and staff. • Self-isolation: mandatory for COVID-19 positive individuals and for their close contacts that are symptomatic or not fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated close contacts or household members are not required to self-isolate if asymptomatic.
ON (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: masks required in indoor public places and some public outdoor settings. • Personal gatherings: indoor limit of 25 people and outdoor limit of 100 people • Organized gatherings: indoor limit of 25 people and outdoor limit of 100 people. • Fitness: indoor limited to 50% capacity, so long as social distancing can be maintained. No outdoor limits so long as social distancing can be maintained. • Restaurants/bars: capacity limited to number of tables that can maintain two metres distance. Must record contact information and screen guests. No dancing or socializing between tables. • LTC: no limit to the number of visitors; visitors must undergo a health screening when entering the building. Masks are required for visitors and staff. • Self-isolation: mandatory for COVID-19 positive individuals and their close contacts that are symptomatic and/or not fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated close contacts are not required to self-isolate if asymptomatic.
QC (15–17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: mandatory on public transit and in enclosed or partially enclosed public places for people age 10 years and over • Personal gatherings: maximum of 10 people from different addresses or the occupants from 3 households indoors, maximum of 20 people from different addresses or the occupants from 3 households • Organized gatherings: maximum 25 people for indoor gatherings with physical distancing and mandatory wearing of face coverings, maximum 50 people for outdoor gatherings with physical distancing • Fitness: lessons provided to individuals and groups of no more than 25 participants, physical distance maintained at all times, wearing a face covering is mandatory when moving from one machine or space to another, compulsory sign-in record • Restaurants/bars: vaccination passport required as of Sept 1/21, maximum 10 people or 3 private residences can share the same table indoors, outdoors maximum 20 people or 3 private residences per table, 50% maximum capacity stipulated on the liquor licence, dancing and karaoke prohibited • LTC: a maximum of 9 people, masks required in common areas, masks not required in the resident's room or outside • Self-isolation: recommended when individuals have symptoms of COVID-19, mandatory when individuals are waiting for a test or have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
NB (18,19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: not mandatory but encouraged in public gatherings • Personal gatherings: no public health measures • Organized gatherings: no public health measures • Fitness: no public health measures • Restaurants/bars: no public health measures • LTC: no capacity limitations on any visitors • Self-isolation: if you have travelled outside of NB or have had a close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19
NS (20,21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: required in most indoor public places



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal gatherings: up to 25 people indoors and up to 50 people outdoors with social distancing and masks • Organized gatherings: 50% of venue capacity up to 150 people indoors and up to 250 people outdoors with social distancing and mask requirements when hosted by a business organization • Fitness: can operate at maximum capacity with social distancing and masks • Restaurants/bars: wearing a mask and social distancing is required, must collect contact data from patrons • LTC: all visitors are permitted, indoor visits can resume in a resident's room or visiting area, residents can have 2 designated caregivers to help with their care • Self-isolation: required if you have COVID-19 symptoms and are waiting to be tested and get test results
PEI (22,23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: no longer mandatory • Personal gatherings: up to a maximum of 50 people • Organized gatherings: up to a maximum of 200 people outdoors and 100 people indoors, require an operational plan • Fitness: no public health measures • Restaurants/bars: maximum capacity is 100 patrons indoors and 200 outdoors, self-serve buffets are not permitted • LTC: masks worn on entry until in the resident's room or area for visitation, a resident may identify an unlimited number of designated visitors without physical distancing • Self-isolation: travellers who are fully vaccinated are able to visit with a PEI pass with testing on entry to PEI if not from the Atlantic provinces
NL (24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: required in common areas such as lobbies, elevators, etc. • Personal gatherings: limited to the number of people that the space can accommodate while maintaining physical distancing • Organized gatherings: no more than 500 people indoors and outdoors and where physical distancing may be maintained • Fitness: operate at capacity limited to no more than 500 people • Restaurants/bars: may operate at 100% capacity provided physical distancing can be maintained • LTC: masks required, visitation limited to 6 designated individuals per resident • Self-isolation: anyone arriving in NFL who is fully or partially vaccinated is not required to self-isolate or get tested for COVID-19, those under 12 and unvaccinated are required to self-isolate upon arrival
YK (25,26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: encouraged for those who serve the public • Personal gatherings: no public health measures • Organized gatherings: no public health measures • Fitness: no public health measures • Restaurants/bars: can choose to develop and follow their own COVID-19 policies and guidelines • LTC: no public health measures • Self-isolation: self-isolate if come into contact or are a household contact of someone with COVID-19
NWT (27,28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks: not required • Personal gatherings: up to 200 people permitted • Organized gatherings: outdoor gatherings of up to 200 people are permitted, additional approvals required for gatherings of more than 200 people • Fitness: return to pre-pandemic indoor capacity as long as not more than 200 people, physical distancing and masking is not required



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restaurants/bars: return to pre-pandemic indoor capacity as long as not more than 200 people, physical distancing and masking is not required LTC: masking and physical distancing not required, facilities may adopt more stringent policies if they wish Self-isolation: all travellers entering NWT must file a self-isolation plan, non-residents of the NWT also require a travel exemption
NU (29,30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks: mandatory in all communities Personal gatherings: no greater than total number of members of the household plus 15 additional persons who do not reside in the dwelling Organized gatherings: 100 persons or 75% of the occupancy for each room in the facility Fitness: compulsory handwashing, provide cleaning products for staff and users, physical distance, keep logbook of users and staff Restaurants/bars: seating limited to 75% of maximum capacity with physical distancing, buffets remain closed LTC: may allow visitors, no more than 2 visitors at once and restricted to immediate family Self-isolation: fully vaccinated travellers do not need to self-isolate

Appendix B: Summary of COVID-19 Procedures in Place for Past Provincial Elections

Past Elections During COVID-19	Procedures in Place
BC (31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical distancing Capacity limits based on square footage of voting place Election officials wore PPE (masks/face visors) Protective barriers (plexiglass) Hand sanitizing stations Frequent cleaning of voting stations and frequently touched surfaces Oral declaration of voting rather than signing Voters removed/discarded counterfoil and inserted into ballot box Only one election official at each station (rather than two) Scrutineers were limited Voters positive for Covid or not feeling well could obtain a vote-by-mail package Online learning for election officials
SK (32)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vote by mail available Elections SK developed COVID-19 Electoral Best Practice Sheets for elections officers and different polling stations to follow. Recommended use of plexiglass or physical barriers to separate voters and workers. Recommended implementation of policies on screening, hand hygiene, signage for physical distancing, signage for proper way-finding, and protocols for how to limit gathering size. Recommended for all election workers to wear masks. Ensure bottles of hand sanitizer for voters and workers. Sanitize surfaces on a cleaning schedule. Offer single use pencils.
NS (33)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All election workers received COVID-19 specific training Additional workers assigned to cleaning Voting stations were disinfected between each voter



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently touched areas (e.g., doorknobs) disinfected every five minutes • Tabletop shields between voters and election workers • Workers sanitize hands between serving each voter • Workers minimize hand-to-hand contact by touching documents as little as possible • Workers wore masks and if not behind a shield they were given a face shield • Only one voter processed at a time • Voters to wear masks at all times • Voters to sanitize hands at entrance and exit • Physical distancing • Voters were provided own individual pencil that is discarded after use • Option to vote by mail through a write-in ballot
YK (34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks mandatory for election officials • Physical distancing floor markers • Minimize face-to-face interactions where possible • Complete the online assessment tool prior to entering voting facility (e.g. staff) • Keep polling place clean • Hang self-screening posters at entrances and outdoor waiting areas • Sanitizers on entry and exit at polling station • Tissues and lined waste containers to be available • Frequent cleaning of high touch surfaces • Additional poll attendant to assist traffic control and sanitization • If possible, separate entry and exit doors available
NL (35)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks required for voters and workers • Voters must sanitize hands prior to entering facility • Each voter was given a new pencil • Voting compartments were sanitized after each voter • High contact areas (e.g., doorknobs) were sanitized frequently • Additional staff hired at all voting locations to sanitize and facilitate social distancing • Floor decals for social distancing • Number of voters permitting inside polling station is limited • Vote by mail or vote early available
NB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational plan guide not available online as per CoVaRR-NET researcher's review

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About CoVaRR-Net

Coronavirus Variants Rapid Response Network (CoVaRR-Net) is a network of interdisciplinary researchers from institutions across the country created to assist in the Government of Canada's overall strategy to address the potential threat of emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants. Pillar Six of CoVaRR-Net studies the impacts of Coronavirus variants on public health, our healthcare system, and on social policy, and reports these findings to decision-makers and government officials.

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