

// Elections – Most Urgent //

**TELANGANA STATE ELECTION COMMISSION
1st Floor, DTCP Building, A.C. Guards, Hyderabad**

CIRCULAR

Cir. No.243/TSEC-ULBs/2021

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BROAD GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS TO LOCAL BODIES IN THE STATE DURING COVID-19

The onset of COVID-19 pandemic in India, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) have been issuing guidelines from time to time. In their circular dated 29th July, 2020, Ministry of Home Affairs has issued comprehensive guidelines/directives to be followed countrywide. Similarly, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has also issued Standard operating Procedures (SOP) on disinfection, sanitization, and prevention for containing COVID-19.

Keeping in view a fresh surge of COVID-19 and in order to curb the high-risk of community spread of novel corona virus (COVID-19), the Commission obtained the precautionary measures to be taken during elections from the Principal Secretary to Govt., Health Department. As per inputs given by Health Department and basing on ECI guidelines, the Commission prescribes the following broad guidelines to be followed during conduct of ordinary and casual elections to Local Bodies in State during the period of COVID-19:

SL.NO.	GUIDELINES TO BE FOLLOWED
1	<p>GENERAL GUIDELINES TO BE FOLLOWED DURING ENTIRE ELECTION PROCESSES BY ALL PERSONS</p> <p>1) Every person shall wear facemask during every election related activity. ("NO MASK NO ENTRY")</p> <p>2) At the entry of Polling Station / premises used for election purpose, sanitizer shall be made available.</p> <p>3) Social distancing shall be maintained as per the COVID-19 guidelines of the State government and Ministry of Home Affairs in the queue lines outside the polling stations duly marking on ground.</p> <p>4) As far as practicable, large halls should be identified and utilized for election purposes to ensure social distancing norms.</p> <p>5) Adequate number of vehicles shall be mobilized for movement of polling personnel and security personnel to ensure compliance of COVID-19</p>

	<p>guidelines.</p> <p>6) Aarogya Setu App should be made compulsory by all election related personnel.</p>
2	<p>NODAL HEALTH OFFICER</p> <p>Nodal Health Officers shall be designated at the District/Municipality/Municipal Corporation, Mandal, GP or Ward level where the elections are to be held to oversee COVID-19 related arrangements and preventive measures during entire electoral process.</p>
3	<p>TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING</p> <p>1) As far as practicable, training of election officials will be organized in decentralized manner in large halls. Virtual training also to be encouraged for conduct of theory training classes.</p> <p>2) All PPTs, training materials, relevant documents, topic wise video clips, question papers for self-assessment may be uploaded in concerned official Portal so that any election official can access it as per requirement.</p> <p>3) Sufficient number of Polling/Counting/Poll related staff shall be kept in reserve by the District Election Authority/Addl. District Election Authority/ Assistant District Election Authority to replace the staff noticed with Covid-19 symptoms.</p>
4	<p>NOMINATION PROCESS</p> <p>I. Following additional options to facilitate On-line mode are hereby provided:</p> <p>1) Contesting candidates may be advised to fill nomination form On-line in the official website of TSEC (tsec.gov.in) and its print may be taken for submitting before the Returning Officer duly signed.</p> <p>2) Affidavit regarding Criminal Antecedents, Assets and Liabilities and Educational Qualifications along with Nomination paper may also be filled in On-line on the website of TSEC (tsec.gov.in) and its print can be taken and after attestation, it may be submitted along with the nomination form before the Returning Officer duly signed.</p> <p>3) Candidates can also prepare reports On-line with regard to day-to-day election expenditure incurred during election process and also final submission of election expenditure prepared on-line.</p>

	<p>II. Further, Commission has directed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Number of persons to accompany the candidate for submission of Nomination is restricted to two i.e. total (3) persons including contesting candidate and proposer. 2) Number of vehicles for the purposes of nomination is restricted to two. 3) Returning Officer's chamber should have sufficient space to perform the functions of nomination, scrutiny and symbol allocation duly following social distancing norms. 4) Returning Officer should allot staggered time in advance to prospective candidates for filing nomination as far as possible. 5) No person shall be allowed into RO's chamber without mask. 6) Large space for waiting for candidate(s) should be arranged. 7) 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 Municipalities Act, 2019 and Panchayat Raj Act, 2018. 8) At all times, sanitizer shall be made available at RO's chamber.
5	<p>ELECTION MATERIAL</p> <p>Election Material Kit shall be prepared in a spacious and sufficiently large hall following all safety, sanitation and social distancing measures.</p>
6	<p>DISTRIBUTION AND COLLECTION OF ELECTION MATERIAL</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Sanitizer shall be made available at each counter of the distribution, reception and counting centres. At these centres, all shall wear mask. 2) Large and spacious halls should be identified for distribution/collection of election material. 3) As far as practicable, it should be organized in decentralized manner. 4) Prior staggered time should be allocated to the polling teams for distribution/ collection of election material.
7	<p>POLLING STATION ARRANGEMENTS</p> <p>Commission has issued detailed instructions for assured minimum facilities at each polling station. Now, in view of COVID-19 situation, following additional steps should be taken:</p>

	<p>1) Mandatory sanitization of Polling Station, preferably, a day before the poll before arrival of poll party.</p> <p>2) Markings to demonstrate social distancing for queue lines near polling stations.</p> <p>3) Earmarking a circle for about (15) persons of with two 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 as far as possible. Otherwise Senior citizens, PWD voters, Lactating Mothers/ pregnant women should be allowed to enter the polling station <u>directly</u> without having to stand in queues.</p> <p>4) The services of BLOs, field staff, volunteers etc may be engaged to monitor and regulate social distancing norms strictly.</p> <p>5) One shaded waiting area 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.</p> <p>6) Sanitizer should be provided at the entry/exit point of every polling station.</p> <p>7) Posters for awareness on COVID-19 should be displayed at visible locations.</p> <p>8) Seating arrangement in polling station for the polling personnel and polling agents shall be made as per the norms of social distancing.</p> <p>9) If polling agent or counting agent is displaying any COVID-19 symptom, then reliever shall be allowed by Presiding / Returning Officer, who will keep a record accordingly.</p> <p>10) Voters shall not be allowed into polling station without mask.</p> <p>11) During the process of identification of voter, the voters are required to lower the facemask for identification, when required.</p> <p>12) At any given time, only one voter shall be allowed to stand in front of each polling official maintaining social distance.</p>
8	<p>KIT FOR POLLING OFFICER</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Mask ii. Sanitizer iii. Face-Shield

9	<p>POSTAL BALLOT</p> <p>1) Option of Postal Ballot facility has been extended to the electors of following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Electors, who are marked as Persons with Disabilities (PwD) b. Electors the age of 80 years and above c. Electors found Covid positive. <p>2) Guidelines for each of these categories are being issued separately.</p>
10	<p>CAMPAIGN BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES/CONTESTING CANDIDATES</p> <p>1) Door to Door Campaign is subject to any other restriction(s) including extant COVID-19 guidelines, a group of five (5) persons, including candidates, excluding security personnel, if any, is allowed to do door to door campaigning.</p> <p>2) Road Shows - The convoy of vehicles should be broken after every two (2) vehicles (excluding the security vehicles, if any). The interval between two sets of convoy of vehicles should be at a gap of 10 meters. There shall be atleast half an hour gap between Road shows of two different political parties / candidates in the same route.</p> <p>3) Election Meetings - Public gatherings/ rallies may be conducted subject to adherence to extant COVID-19 guidelines. Commissioner & Director Municipal Administration & Election Authority / Commissioner of Panchayat Raj & EA should take following steps for this purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) District Election Authorities/Addl. District Election Authorities should, in advance, identify dedicated grounds for public gathering with clearly marked Entry/Exit points. b) In all such identified grounds, the District Election Authority should, in advance, put markers to ensure social distancing norms by the attendees. c) Nodal District Health Officer should be involved in the process to ensure that all COVID-19 related guidelines are adhered to by all concerned in the district. d) District Election Authority and Commissioner of Police / District Superintendent of Police should ensure that the number of attendees does not exceed the limit prescribed by State Disaster Management Authority for public gatherings. e) District Election Authority should depute Sector Health Regulators to

	<p>oversee that COVID-19 instructions/guidelines are being followed during these meetings.</p> <p>f) The political parties and candidates concerned should ensure that all COVID-19 related requirements and precautions like face masks, sanitizers, social distancing etc. are fulfilled during each of these activities.</p> <p>g) Non-compliance of Instructions – Anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures will be liable to proceed 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. Commissioner & Election Authority should bring this to the notice of all concerned.</p>
11	<p>STRONG-ROOM ARRANGEMENTS</p> <p>1) Strong Room should be sanitized in advance</p> <p>2) Social Distancing and other safety norms shall be followed for each activity.</p>
12	<p>COUNTING OF VOTES</p> <p>1) Not more than (9) counting tables (except RO table) should be allowed in spacious counting hall.</p> <p>2) Sanitizer shall be made available on each counting table.</p> <p>3) Ballot Boxes should be sanitized before placing them over the counting tables.</p> <p>4) The counting centres shall be disinfected before, during and after the counting.</p> <p>5) If required, Postal Ballots may be counted in a separate hall under the supervision of the Assistant Returning officer.</p> <p>6) All the persons i.e., ROs, AROs, counting supervisors, counting Assistants, counting agents etc., shall wear masks / sanitize their hands before entering counting hall and on regular intervals.</p> <p>7) PPE kits may be made available to those staff who carry Ballot boxes and for those individuals who are involved in mixing of Ballot papers.</p>

These instructions shall be brought to notice of all the concerned for their information and strict compliance. **These instructions are applicable to all earlier circular/ orders/ notifications / instructions issued by the SEC.**

(BY ORDER AND IN THE NAME OF THE STATE ELECTION COMMISSIONER)

**Sd/- M. Ashok Kumar
Secretary**

To

The Commissioner & Director Municipal Administration & EA, Hyderabad.

The Commissioner of Panchayat Raj and Rural Employment & EA, Hyderabad.

Copy to:

1. The Principal Secretary to Government, MA & UD, Department, Telangana, Hyderabad.
2. The Secretary to Government, PR & RD, Department, Telangana, Hyderabad.
3. All concerned Collectors & District Election Authorities in the state
4. All concerned Commissioners of Municipal Corporations/Municipalities in the state
5. All concerned Chief Executive Officers in the state.
6. All concerned District Panchayat Officers in the state.
7. All concerned MPDOs & Assistant Election Authorities in the State.
8. The Presidents/ Secretaries of all political parties registered with TSEC.
9. All Returning Officers
10. Print & Electronic Media for wide publicity.

// Attested//


Assistant Secretary



