

Directive Issued to Mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 during Elections No. 9/2021

Chapter one

General Provisions

Article 1. Issuing Authority

The National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) issued this Directive in accordance with Article 163(2) of the Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation No 1162/2019.

Article 2. Short Title

This directive may be cited as “**Directive Issued to Mitigate the Transmission of COVID-19 during Elections Directive No. 9/2021**”.

Article 3. Definitions

1. “**COVID-19**” means a communicable disease designated as such by the World Health Organisation, unless the context otherwise requires.
2. “**Proclamation**” means the Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation No. 1162/2019.
3. “**Board**” means the National Election Board of Ethiopia.
4. “**Physical distancing**” means keeping at least two adult strides or two metres between two or more people.
5. “**Meeting**” means the gathering of four or more persons, who are not members of the same household, for the purpose of election related activities.
6. “**Election Related Activities**” means voter registration, voter education, training of election staff; agents of candidates; observers or other electoral stakeholders; candidate registration; candidate and political party meetings; campaigns and rallies; voting; vote counting; electoral dispute resolution; electoral observation; media reporting on the elections; transportation of election materials and other similar activities.
7. “**Disinfectant**” means alcohol or chlorine-based compound with minimum 60% alcohol used for the purpose of disinfecting items or surfaces to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

8. **“COVID-19 and Elections Taskforce”** is a task force at the federal, regional and constituency levels composed of representatives of the National Election Board of Ethiopia and the Federal Ministry of Health. Political parties and civil society organisations engaged in electoral activities may join the task force as observers.
9. **“Region”** means regions established under the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and includes the Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa City Administrations.
10. **“Persons Vulnerable to serious COVID-19 Illnesses”** means individuals who are 60 years old and above and pregnant women. Individuals visibly suffering from *or* having medical proof of suffering from asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, or who are immunocompromised shall also be considered as persons vulnerable to COVID-19.
11. **“Board’s Staff”** means a person employed permanently or temporarily by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia.
12. **“Election Security officer”** means a law enforcement official tasked with providing security to an election-related activity.
13. **“Person”** means any natural or legal person.
14. Definitions provided in the proclamation and the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia Establishment Proclamation No. 1133/2019 shall, as appropriate, also apply for this directive.

Article 4. Scope of Application

This directive shall be applicable on general election, local election, by-election, re-election, referendum, the Board and the Board’s establishments at various levels as well as persons who conduct and participate in election related activities.

Article 5. Gender Reference

Provisions set out in one gender shall also apply to the other gender.

Article 6. Objective

The objective of this directive is to establish a transparent system to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in the operation of election related activities during election.

Chapter Two

The Responsibility to Take COVID-19 Mitigation Measures

Article 7. Duties of the Board and Election Officers

1. Election officers shall ensure that all election related activities at polling stations and Board's offices at different levels are conducted by maintaining proper physical distancing.
2. No person shall engage in physical contact during election related activities.
3. Where the required physical distancing could not otherwise be maintained in a polling station during voter registration or voting, the head of the polling station may limit the number of accredited election observers, candidate or party agents and journalists at any given time. In this case, an equitable rotation system shall be implemented, subject to review by the Polling Station Grievance Hearing Committee.
4. Limitation of number and the rotation system provided for under sub article (3) above shall be implemented in the manner provided hereunder.
 - a) Where there is large number of agents of candidates, accredited media and observers in a polling station, the rotation system shall be decided by lottery drawn in the presence of all.
 - b) The head of the polling station shall ensure that the rotation system does not under any circumstances preclude an observer from being present in the polling station.
5. This provision shall not preclude poll workers from providing support to registrants who may need special assistance by using personal protective equipment.
6. This provision shall not preclude family members or other individuals from providing physical support to persons needing such kind of support such as the elderly and persons with disabilities. However, the people who assist must take all precautionary measures such as wearing face mask and cleaning their hands with sanitizer or soap and water before and after assisting.
7. The Board shall take COVID-19 mitigation measures into consideration when selecting the indelible ink used to indicate a person has voted and the method of application.

8. All polling stations shall create a conducive environment to provide special treatment for female election officers, agents of candidates, observers and other staff that come with infants.
9. The Board shall ensure that polling stations and constituency election offices mark spots as well as post messages inside and outside their offices to allow voters, candidates and other stakeholders to maintain the required physical distancing.
10. The Board shall endeavour to ensure one-way flow for voters, and that polling stations and constituency offices are properly ventilated, with separate entrance and exit. When deciding the entrance and exit spots, the constituency office and polling stations shall consider accessibility to people with disability and other vulnerable people.
11. The Board shall develop a model polling station and constituency electoral office layout compatible with physical distancing guidelines of the Ministry of Health which at the same time shall consider the needs of people with disability and other vulnerable people. This shall give the necessary information regarding selection and number of polling stations and constituency offices. The Board shall ensure that the information is included in the Board's staff training programs.
12. The Board shall communicate to the public and all persons involved in election-related activities the need to respect physical distancing measures.
13. The Board shall ensure that election officers as well as offices of the Board found at various levels are monitoring and enforcing that physical distancing is properly maintained during voter registration and polling day. Election officials may seek the assistance of election security officers to ensure that physical distancing is being maintained.
14. The Board shall monitor that each person carrying out election related activities is discharging his duties of ensuring physical distancing are being maintained. This shall include putting signposts inside and outside the premises; endeavouring to ensure a one-way flow for all persons using the premises or attending events, ensuring that as much as possible events are conducted outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces and ensuring that all physical distancing requirements are respected during implementation of election activities.

15. All staff of the Board, election officers, candidates contesting in elections, election observers, agents of candidates, accredited voter education providers, accredited journalists, those providing training or attending training on election related activities and election security officers shall be required to wear a face mask or other items that properly cover their mouth and nose during all election related activities.
16. The Board shall ensure that hand sanitizer or hand washing facilities (including adequate water and soap) are available at the entrance to all of its premises as well as all polling stations. It shall ensure that every person visiting such premises or polling stations fulfil the requirement to sanitise or wash his/her hands before entering.
17. The Board shall ensure that a proper waste disposal system suitable for mitigating the spread of COVID-19 is established in its premises and polling stations.
18. The Board shall provide appropriate personal protective equipment, such as masks and other equipment to all staff directly involved in election related activities.
19. The Board shall ensure the provision of publicly visible information on of mitigation measures of COVID-19 in all polling stations and premises of the Board.
20. Besides the Board, it shall be the responsibility of each person carrying out election related activities, to ensure compliance with the requirements set out in this directive relating to wearing face mask, hand-sanitising or hand-washing in all of their election related activities, and the requirement to provide public information about COVID-19 prevention measures within their premises.
21. This requirement set out above under sub articles (1)-(20) shall not apply:
 - a) On individuals with medically proven respiratory or related medical condition.
 - b) On individuals requested to lower their face masks by the Board's staff for the purpose of having their identity checked,
 - c) Where it is necessary to lower mask when speaking in meetings.
 - d) The people who are required to lower their face masks as provided under sub-article (b) and (c) above shall implement other precautionary measures such as physical distancing requirement.

Article 8. Issuing COVID-19 Code of Conduct During Election

1. The Board shall prepare a COVID-19 Elections Code of Conduct which gives special emphasis to women and persons with special needs in consultation with political parties, health sector, and other relevant stakeholders.
2. All registered political parties, candidates and institutions accredited to conduct voter education, observe, or report on the elections shall sign the Code of Conduct.

Chapter Three

Measures that Must be Taken to Mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 During Election Processes

Article 9. Voter Education

1. Accredited voter education providers are encouraged to conduct voter education primarily through regular and online mass media.
2. If they provide voter education in-person, they are encouraged to use open spaces and well-ventilated venues.
3. Voter education programmes shall include information regarding COVID-19 transmission methods and precautionary measures to be implemented during election activities, including that a different timeline is allocated for registration and voting for persons vulnerable to serious COVID-19 illnesses, and encouraging voters to bring their own pens to polling stations.
4. Institutions accredited to provide voter education shall ensure trainers and participants wear face mask or other item that properly covers their mouth and nose as well as compliance with the requirements put in this directive and the Code of Conduct.
5. Efforts to make the education accessible to all by the accredited bodies, should include disseminating it in areas where women and other people with special needs live or work, as well as through formal and informal associations where they are organized.

Article 10. Voter Registration

1. The Board shall assign an election officer or queue controller to ensure physical distancing is maintained inside and outside of polling stations during voter registration.

2. The head of the polling station shall ensure that repeatedly-used equipment, such as pens, and repeatedly-touched surfaces are regularly disinfected by an alcohol-based sanitizer or a disinfectant.

3. The Board may allocate a different timeline for the registration of persons vulnerable to serious COVID-19 illnesses. In doing so, the Board shall consider the needs of people who are caring for family members affected by COVID -19 related illness, the elderly, women with infants and people with special needs.

4. All polling stations shall designate a special priority lane for individuals belonging to vulnerable persons who register outside the designated timeline provided under sub-article (3).

Article 11. Collection of Endorsement Signatures by Candidates

Candidates and Political Parties

1. Shall ensure that physical distancing regulation are respected during collection of candidature endorsement signatures.

2. Shall wear face masks and other material that properly covers their mouth and nose and ensure that individuals supporting the collection of signatures process also wear the same.

3. Shall ensure that equipment repeatedly used by different people, such as pens, are regularly disinfected with disinfectant or alcohol-based sanitizers.

Article 12. Public Meetings and Campaigns

1. Participants in election related meetings or campaigns shall wear face masks or other items that properly cover their mouth and nose.

2. Political parties shall educate COVID-19 mitigation measures during meetings and campaigns using various awareness creation methods.

3. In addition to those areas listed under article 46(1) of the Proclamation, it is prohibited to conduct election campaign at the following locations:

- a) Government Health institutions;
- b) COVID-19 treatment and quarantine centres;
- c) Nursing homes for the elderly

Article 13. Requirement of Notice for Meetings and Campaigns

1. Organisers of election related meetings, voter education, trainings and campaign activities involving more than 50 participants must notify the Board's Headquarter or the appropriate regional or constituency office, in writing, at least 48 hours in advance of the event.

2. For the notice mentioned under sub-article (1) of this article the COVID-19 Elections Taskforce shall develop a notice form, alongside a checklist of the measures set out in this directive and list of verifications, which must be freely and easily available to organisers of meetings or campaigns.

3. If there is any reason to prevent an election related meeting or campaign due to concerns about high risks of COVID-19 transmission, the Board must inform the organisers of such decision in writing, with clear reasons, within 24 hours of receiving the notification.

4. Any organ aggrieved by the decision of the Board specified under sub-article (3) above may submit its grievance to the Board's office found at various levels, which should give decision within 48 hours of receiving the complaint.

Article 14. Voting

1. The head of the polling station shall assign an election officer or a queue controller to ensure physical distancing is maintained inside and outside of polling stations on voting day.

2. The head of the polling station shall ensure that repeatedly used equipment, such as pens, and surfaces, are regularly disinfected with disinfectant or alcohol-based sanitizer.

3. The Board may setup a different timeline for voting by persons vulnerable to serious COVID-19 illnesses.

4. All polling stations shall designate a special priority lane for other vulnerable people who vote outside of the different timeline provided for under sub article (3) above.

Article 15. Vote counting

1. Prior to the commencement of vote counting election officers shall make sure the ballot box is cleaned with a disinfectant or sanitizer

2. Election officers shall wear gloves or regularly clean their hands and materials that are repeatedly touched with a sanitizer during vote counting and tabulation. They shall also sanitize other materials that are repeatedly touched during vote counting.

Article 16. Election observation and reporting

1. Election observers and journalists shall cooperate with heads of polling stations in the implementation of rotation systems to enter polling stations as provided under article 4(1) of this directive.

2. Polling station officials shall create conditions to create awareness to enable observers comply with the requirements of this directive.

Article 17. Electoral Roll and Announcement of Vote Counting

1. The Board shall ensure that the mitigation measures of Covid-19 transmission listed under article 7 of this directive are properly implemented during the display period and when the result of vote counting is announced to the public.

2. The Board shall make every effort to broadcast the display and the result of vote counting via mass media (radio, TV, newspaper etc.).

Article 18. Electoral dispute resolution processes

1. Grievance Hearing Committees should set up complaint hearing areas in a manner compatible with model polling station and constituency electoral office layout developed by the Board and physical distancing regulation of the Ministry of Health as provided under article 7 (10) of this directive.

2. Grievance hearing committees shall, as much possible, hold hearings in open and well-ventilated spaces.

3. They shall provide hand sanitizer or hand washing facilities with water and soap for all interested parties.

4. All parties who come to the grievance hearing committees shall wear face masks or other items that properly cover their mouth and nose.

5. Grievance hearing committees may impose limits on the number of attendees during proceedings.

Chapter Four

Miscellaneous

Article 19. Establishing COVID-19 Election Taskforce

1. The Board shall establish an election COVID-19 taskforce at regional branch office, constituency and polling station levels. This taskforce shall include Ministry of Health and health bureaus at regions, zones, woredas and kebele level and may, as appropriate, invite political parties and civil society organizations.
2. The taskforce may outline a procedure on measures to be taken when a person with symptoms of COVID-19 is found during the election process.

Article 20. Penalties

1. Election officers and the Board's staff, candidates, accredited election observers, agents of candidates, and journalists who refuse to wear face masks or other items that properly cover the mouth and nose, as required in this directive, shall be denied access to polling stations, the Board's premises and grievance hearing areas.
2. Voters who refuse to be marked with indelible ink to show that they have voted shall not be allowed to vote.
3. Failure to respect measures provided under this directive may be punishable under relevant health and criminal laws.
4. Whenever the Board receives tangible information regarding the failure to respect requirements for meetings and campaigns, it shall pass the information to relevant law enforcement officials.

Article 21. Special Measures

The Board may set forth different provisions for different areas of the country according to the level of risk identified by the relevant health authorities. This may involve imposing additional requirements in specific geographic area or creating exceptions to those provided in this directive.

Article 22. Periodic Revision of Directive

1. When reviewing the implementation of the provisions of this directive, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia shall consult with the relevant health sector, the Taskforce established as per this directive, political parties and other electoral stakeholders.
2. The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia may issue detailed procedures and directives, considering changes in public health measures to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Article 23. Effective Date

This Directive shall be effective from February 11, 2021

Birtukan Midekssa

Chairperson of National Electoral Board of Ethiopia