



GOVERNMENT OF KERALA

Abstract

Election Department–Guidelines for conduct of Kerala Legislative Assembly Elections 2021 during Covid 19 - orders issued

Election (Equipment) Department

GO(Rt) No.85/2021/Elec.

Dated, Thiruvananthapuram, 11.02.2021

- Read:-
1. Document No.324.6.EPS.OT.001.2020 Election Commission of India.
 2. Letter No. 52/2021/SDR/VOL.I dated 02.02.2021 of the Election Commission of India.
 3. Minutes of the meeting held by Chief Electoral Officer on 08.01.2021 and 09.02.2021.
 4. E-mail dated 10.02.2021 from Director of Health Services

ORDER

In view of the ongoing covid-19 pandemic, Election Commission of India as per the broad guide lines read as 1st paper above has directed to prepare a detailed comprehensive Covid 19 Plan at State level taking local conditions in to account. Accordingly, Chief Electoral Officer along with Covid 19 Nodal Officer held detailed discussions with Principal Secretary (Health), Director of Health Services and other senior officers on 08.01.2021 and 09.02.2021. Based on the detailed discussions and decisions taken in these meetings, Director of Health Services, as per the e-mail read as 4th paper above has furnished Covid 19 Guidelines for the conduct of Kerala Legislative Assembly Election 2021. Government have examined the guidelines with reference to the extant instructions of Election Commission of India and State specific COVID-19 protocols. Consequently, to ensure holding of safe Kerala Legislative Assembly Elections 2021, the following guidelines are issued. These guidelines are to be followed through all the phases of Kerala Legislative Assembly Elections 2021.

A. GENERAL GUIDELINES TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE ENTIRE ELECTION PROCESS FOR ALL

PERSONS

- 1) Every person shall wear a face mask during all election related activities.
- 2) At the entry of hall/ room/ premises used for election purposes:
 - a. Thermal Scanning of all persons shall be carried out.

Thermal scanning shall be done either by Asha workers, paramedical staff or trained volunteers from NSS/ Student Police cadets, wearing appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), using a thermal scanner by holding it 3 cm to 15 cm away from the person's forehead. Any person found having fever ($\geq 37.5^{\circ}\text{C}/\geq 99.5^{\circ}\text{F}$) must be isolated. In

case of electors, if temperature is above the set norms of MoHFW at first reading, then it will be checked twice and if it remains, the elector shall be provided with a 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 have a facilitated voting, strictly following COVID-19 related preventive measures.

- a. Sanitizer, liquid soap and water shall be made available at appropriate places.
- 3) Physical distancing shall be maintained throughout. Everyone shall be required to ensure and maintain physical distancing of at least 2 M (6 Ft.). Seating arrangement shall be organized in such a way that physical distancing is maintained.
- 4) Wherever possible, large halls should be identified and utilized, and windows kept open for proper air circulation and without Air conditioning. The R.O.'s Room, Polling Room, Counting Room and all other rooms, including waiting areas used for the election activities shall be thoroughly sanitized as per existing guideline (Annexure 1)
- 5) Toilets and washrooms in the premises shall be disinfected based on existing guidelines.

Liquid Soap dispenser shall also be made available in all washrooms/ rest rooms/ Toilets (Annexure 1)

B. CO-ORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

For overall co-ordination of activities and effective implementation of Covid protocols during the election process, there shall be a State Nodal Officer for Covid 19 in the Chief Electoral Officer's Office, appointed by the Chief Secretary as per directions of the Election Commission. The State Nodal officer shall ensure compliance of COVID guidelines during the whole Election process.

There shall further be Health coordination teams at the State, District and Constituency level as under :

State level Health Coordination Team

Chair: Principal Secretary Health

Convenor: Director of Health Services (Nodal Health Officer for the State)

Members: Managing Director Kerala Medical Services Corporation Ltd (KMSCL), Additional Chief Election Officer, Additional Directors Planning & Vigilance

District level Health Coordination Team

Chair: District Election Officer (DEO)

Convenor: District Medical Officer (DMO)

Members: Deputy DMO, Technical Assistant Grade1, District Drug warehouse managers (KMSCL)

Constituency level Health Coordination Team

Chair: Returning Officer (RO)

Convenor: Designated Nodal Officer

Members: Health Supervisor/Health Inspector

NODAL HEALTH OFFICERS

Nodal Health Officers will be convenors of the Health coordination teams that will execute COVID-19 related arrangements and other preventive measures during entire electoral process.

NODAL HEALTH OFFICERS AT VARIOUS LEVELS ARE :

No	LEVEL	Nodal Officer	Procurement and Supply
1	State	Director of Health Services	KMSCL – Nodal Agency GM (KMSCL) Nodal Officer
2	District	District Medical Officer	Officer
3	Constituency	As per Annexure	
4	Booth	As per Annexure	

C. PHASES OF ELECTION

The whole election related process shall be divided into

- a. Pre-Poll Phase including Postal Ballot.
- b. Election Phase
- c. Post-Election Phase

a. *PRE -POLL PHASE*

Pre-Poll Phase starts from notification of election and includes Nomination submission, Campaigning by Political Parties, Randomization of EVM, preparing Election materials, delivery and collection of Postal Ballots.

1. TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Preparation & dissemination of Health Advisories detailing the COVID protocols should be coordinated at all levels.

- i. Training of election officials shall be organized wherever possible through online platform.
- ii. If physical training is planned for election officials, the same may be organized in decentralized manner at large halls maintaining social distancing and infection

control practices.

- iii. All relevant training materials and documents shall be uploaded in app/ portal. All COVID -19 Protocol training materials will be available in the LMS portal of Health and Family Welfare Department

2. NOMINATION PROCESS

- Number of persons to accompany candidate for submission of nomination is restricted to two (2). (This is in supersession of existing Para 5.8.1 of Returning Officer's Handbook 2019)
- Number of vehicles for the purposes of nomination is restricted to two (2). (This is in supersession of existing Para 5.8.1 of Returning Officer's Handbook 2019)
- Returning Officer's chamber should have sufficient space to perform the functions of nomination, scrutiny and symbol allocation following social distancing norms.* (schematic diagram1)
- Large space for waiting for candidate(s) should be arranged.
- All steps for maintaining COVID 19 protocol during entire process of nomination should be ensured including the thermal scanning of Candidates and accompanying persons.
- Strict physical distancing as per COVID 19 protocols shall be ensured.
- Use of masks, gloves and face shields by the candidate & the persons accompanying shall be insisted.
- Sanitizers shall be provided in sufficient quantity during the process.
- N95 masks & Face shields shall be provided to the DEOs/ROs during the nomination.

3. CAMPAIGN BY THE POLITICAL PARTIES/CONTESTING CANDIDATES

- i. **Door to Door Campaign-**
 - a. Subject to any other restriction(s) including COVID-19 guidelines, a group of 5 (five) persons including candidates, excluding security personnel, if any, is allowed to do door to door campaigning.
- ii. **Road Shows –**
 - a. The convoy of vehicles should be broken after every 5 (five) vehicles instead of 10 vehicles (excluding the security vehicles, if any). The interval between two sets of convoys of vehicles should be half an hour instead of gap of 100 meters. (In supersession of Para 5.8.1 of Returning Officer's Handbook 2019)

iii. **Election Meetings - Public gatherings/rallies**

Public gatherings/rallies may be conducted subject to adherence to COVID-19 guidelines. District Election Officer should take following steps for this purpose:

(a) District Election Officer should, in advance, identify dedicated grounds for public gathering with clearly marked Entry/Exit points.

(b) In all such identified grounds, the District Election Officer 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 by all concerned in the district.

(d) The Nodal Health Officer should oversee that COVID-19 instructions/guidelines are being followed during these meetings.

(e) The political parties and candidates concerned should ensure that all COVID-19 related requirement like face masks, sanitizers, thermal scanning etc. are fulfilled during each of these activities.

(f) Non-compliance of Instructions – Anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures will be liable to 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.

iv. Allocation of public spaces must be done using Suvidha app in the manner already prescribed by Election Commission.

4. FIRST & SECOND RANDOMIZATION OF EVMS/VVPATS

- i. First & Second randomization and preparation of EVMs/VVPATs shall be done in large halls abiding by existing COVID 19 guidelines
- 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.
- iv. Triple layer Masks shall also be ensured for the officers.

5. ELECTION MATERIAL

Election Material Kit shall be prepared in a spacious and sufficiently large hall following all safety, sanitation and social distancing measures.

6. POSTAL BALLOT (PB) (Ref. Letter No. 52/202/SDR/VOL.I Dtd. 02.02.2021 of ECI

1) Option for Postal Ballot

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

- a. Electors above the age of 80 years (AVSC)
- b. Electors, who are marked as Persons with Disabilities (PwD) in the electoral roll (AVPD)
- c. Electors who are COVID- 19 positive/suspect* and in quarantine (home/ institutional) (AVCO)

****suspect is a person who meets the clinical AND epidemiological criteria: as per WHO COVID19 Case definitions as indicated in Annexure 6.***

The above categories of electors who opt to vote through postal ballot will hence forth be called absentee voters in each of the following categories :

- (a) 'AVSC', (b) 'AVPD' and (c) AVCO

2) Process of applying for PB

(2.1) An Absentee Voter wishing to vote by postal ballot has to make application to the Returning Officer (RO) of the constituency concerned, in Form-12D, giving all requisite particulars. Such application seeking postal ballot facility should reach to the RO during the period from date of announcement of election to five days following the date of notification of the election concerned.

(2.2) As per the amended provisions under Rule 27E and 27-I of CER, 1961 the issue of Postal ballot paper to the absentee voter and return of the ballot paper after voting shall be in such manner as the Commission may direct. Accordingly, the Commission has laid down the following procedure/guidelines for facilitating voting through postal ballot by the absentee voters of senior citizen category (AVSC), absentee voters belonging to PWD category (AVPD) and absentee voters belonging to COVID 19 category (AVCO).

(2.3) If any elector at the time of election is hospitalized on account of COVID-19, in a hospital within the State or is in Home/ Institutional Quarantine on account of COVID-19 and hence not be in a position to cast vote personally at the polling station as per medical advice and if such elector makes request for issue of Postal Ballot, the RO concerned, on being satisfied about the genuineness of the application, shall provide the postal ballot to the elector. The RO shall make arrangement to start deliver Postal Ballots and to get the same collected back

from the said elector before the date fixed for poll in the Constituency. This arrangement shall be made in coordination with the Nodal Officer for COVID- 19, designated by the Chief Secretary, on the directions of the Commission. Application for postal ballot paper from such electors (Form 12D) should be accompanied by copy of certificate/ instructions from competent health authorities which show that the applicant is hospitalized in the State or is in quarantine within the State (Home or Institutional) on account of COVID 19.

(2.4) In case of absentee voters belonging to PWD category (AVPD), who opt for postal ballot, application (Form 12D) should be accompanied by a copy of benchmark disability certificate specified by the concerned appropriate Government, under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

3. ACTION BY R O

(3.1) Distribution of Form 12 D by BLO:

- (a) BLO will visit to the houses of the absentee voters in category of AVSC, AVPD and AVCO, as per details provided by the RO, in the Polling Station area and deliver Form 12D to the concerned electors and obtain acknowledgements from them.
- (b) BLO shall deposit all the Acknowledgements obtained from the electors with the RO.
- (c) If an elector is not available, BLO will share his/her contact details and revisit to collect it within five days of the notification.
- (d) The elector may or may not opt for Postal Ballot. If he/she opts for Postal Ballot, then the BLO will collect the filled-in-Form 12D from the house of the elector within five days of the notification and deposit with the RO forthwith.
- (e) Sector Officer shall supervise the process of distribution and collection of Form 12D by BLOs under the overall supervision of RO.

(3.2) On receipt of application in Form-12D, the RO will draw a list (format as annexure-1) of all Absentee Voters in the 3 categories, i.e. (a) 'AVSC', (b) 'AVPD' and (c) AVCO, whose applications have been received in time and are in order.

(3.3) On the last date for making nominations for the election, the electoral roll is frozen for that election and no further addition or deletion can be carried out in the roll till the completion of the election. At this stage, RO shall verify and ensure that the applicants for postal ballots are registered as elector and their electoral particulars given in Form 12-D are correct with reference to the existing electoral roll. All the electors, whose particulars with reference to the electoral roll