

Casting Your Vote Safely During a Pandemic: Tips for Voters Before Heading to the Polls

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With the November 3 election fast approaching, and the world still in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to make some considerations to stay safe while exercising your right to vote.

Voters in Illinois and Michigan have several ways to vote – absentee by mail, early voting in person or in-person on Election Day.

Lori Grooms is the director of infection prevention for OSF HealthCare. She says anything in person should come with the same checklist as other errands and activities outside of the home.

“You’re going to want to follow the exact same things,” advises Grooms. “You’re going to want to make sure you have your mask with you, your hand sanitizer with you; when you get out of your car, put your mask on and keep it on until you get back in the car; before you go in, clean your hands, when you come out, clean your hands.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has created a guide for election officials and voters alike, to slow the spread of COVID-19 while ballots are being cast.

While many of the CDC’s recommendations are the responsibility of poll workers, like cleaning and disinfection voting equipment, voters can also take steps to keep themselves safe while voting.

Grooms agrees, and suggests going to vote during off-peak times, such as mid-morning. She also recommends giving yourself plenty of time to monitor the voter line from your car and join it when it’s shorter.

“You may want to wait until some people come out, especially if the line is long and outside the door. Just take your time. Plan for possibly being in the parking lot and waiting for 20 – 30 minutes if you live in an area where there is a lot of voting, or if you live in a highly populated area,” suggests Grooms.

Along with wearing a mask, physical distancing is also important to maintain while voting in person. Long lines might make this difficult, but Grooms says don’t be afraid to politely advocate for space.

“You want to make sure you keep that six foot distance,” she said. “You can remind others that, ‘I would appreciate if you would back up a little bit. I’m trying to maintain my space.’”

Grooms continued, “It is your own health. It is your own safety. You don’t need to be rude about it, but you can let people know, ‘I’m doing this for your protection, and for my protection, and it would be best if we have some distance between us.’”

Voters should also do their homework before Election Day. The CDC recommends checking your voting location and requirements in advance because they may have changed due to COVID-19. You should also verify your voter registration information is correct in advance of reporting to the polling location.

Grooms adds where possible, voters should review or complete a sample ballot at home to speed the process of casting your ballot at the polling location.

“You can log on to the Illinois State Board of Elections, and go in with your determination made. This is not the year to go and look at the ballot and then determine who you want to vote for. Really know what your intent is as you go into the election. That way you spend less time and you’re able to get in and get out much quicker,” Grooms recommends.

Voting is one of the greatest democratic rights Americans have. Lyndon B. Johnson famously said of voting, “This right to vote is the basic right without which all others are meaningless. It gives people, people as individuals, control over their own destinies.”

To help you prepare to safely cast your ballot, and for additional voting information, [click here in Illinois](#), and [click here for information in the state of Michigan](#).