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SUBMISSION BY THE MOSENEKE INQUIRY INTO ENSURING FREE AND FAIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This report is to supplement the IEC report and COVID -19 precautions from a health and prevention perspective. We will not comment on any of the procedures unless it relates to health.

1. Background

Voting will bring many people together that would not normally be in the same physical space, this could thus be a “super spreader” event of COVID -19, unless every precaution is taken. Those at highest risk are those who remain at the voting station all day (the workers). Thus the IEC should consider vaccinating the people “manning” the voting stations.

2. COVID 19 precautions

Recent (May 2021) guidelines from the CDC indicate that the SARS COV2 is spread through the air. Protection methods include adequate ventilation and no prolonged (>15 mins) exposure.¹

It is for this reason that the plans by the IEC are insufficient to protect the “workers” and the public. Wearing of masks (covering mouth and nose) is essential, but this also should state that some so-called masks are inadequate –such as those with valves and ‘snugs’.² Frequent hand sanitising is recommended and critical in the context. Physical distancing is also important as this lessens (but does not eliminate) the risk of acquiring COVID-19. Added to the precautions should be:

- The voting hall/ venue must have ALL windows open and fans to mix up the air where possible. The ventilation is more important even than wearing masks.
- To avoid prolonged exposure workers should take regular breaks outside.

Home visits are high risk as the voters are likely to be vulnerable and the workers to also be at risk. Where possible the voting should take place outdoors rather than indoors or in a well ventilated room. PPE should be adequate.

Gloves are not helpful in this context and may introduce a sense of complacency. The spread of the virus can occur on gloved hands – yet these might not be cleaned as often as bare hands (also a substantial wasted cost)

Sick people

What do to with people who are ill (even with mild flu like symptoms) on the day of voting needs to be thought through, as sick people should be discouraged from going to voting stations.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/sars-cov-2-transmission.html>

² Masks with vents or exhalation valves are not advised because they allow unfiltered breath to escape the mask. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-masks>

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Communication

This is often a neglected area – both to the public and to the workers. Communication about what to expect is important. The public must be informed about the protective measures and what will be expected of them.

Workers need to be informed about the importance of the prevention measures particularly ventilation. They need to be taught how to handle people not wearing masks or not wearing them correctly in the context of the right to vote, how to deal with people not keeping sufficient physical distances.

The communication needs to be in multiple languages and in plain language (not scientific jargon) – any materials need to be tested with appropriate people to ensure that they are understandable and are giving the correct message (and not unintended messages)

Appendix 1

Improving Ventilation

The CDC has released [important guidance](#) about ways to improve ventilation and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in buildings. Below are a number of strategies to do so. Some of these recommendations are based on ASHRAE [Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). Review these ASHRAE guidelines for further information on ventilation recommendations.

- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and provide acceptable indoor air quality for the current occupancy level for each space.
- Increase ventilation rates when possible.
- When weather conditions allow, increase fresh outdoor air by opening windows and doors. Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk (e.g., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms) to occupants in the building.
- Use fans to increase the effectiveness of open windows. To safely achieve this, fan placement is important. Avoid placing fans in a way that could potentially cause contaminated air to flow directly from one person over another. One helpful strategy is to use a window fan, placed safely and securely in a window, to exhaust room air to the outdoors. This will help draw fresh air into the room via other open windows and doors without generating strong room air currents.
- Disable demand-controlled ventilation (DCV).
- Reduce or eliminate recirculation, for example by opening minimum outdoor air dampers. In mild weather, this will not affect thermal comfort or humidity. However, this may be difficult to do in cold or hot weather.
- Improve central air filtration to the [MERV-13](#) (the grade of filter recommended by ASHRAE) or the highest compatible with the filter rack, and seal edges of the filter to limit bypass.
- Check filters to ensure they are within service life and appropriately installed.
- Keep systems running longer hours, 24/7 if possible, to enhance air exchanges in the building space.
- Ensure restroom exhaust fans are functional and operating at full capacity.
- Inspect and maintain local exhaust ventilation in areas such as kitchens and cooking areas.
- Use portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) fan/filtration systems to help enhance air cleaning (especially in higher-risk areas such as a nurse's office or areas frequently inhabited by persons with higher likelihood of COVID-19 and/or increased risk of getting COVID-19).
- Generate clean-to-less-clean air movement by re-evaluating the positioning of supply and exhaust air diffusers and/or dampers (especially in higher-risk areas).
- Consider using ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI) as a supplement to help inactivate SARS-CoV-2, especially if options for increasing room ventilation are limited. Upper-room UVGI systems can be used to provide air cleaning within occupied spaces, and in-duct UVGI systems can help enhance air cleaning inside central ventilation systems.
- If ventilation cannot be increased, reduce occupancy level in the building. This increases the effective dilution ventilation per person.