

Travel to remote areas

NTEC staff

This document has been produced in consultation with the NT Department of Health (DOH) and is subject to change.

Purpose

The NT Legislative Assembly General Election (2020 Territory Election) is scheduled for Saturday, 22 August 2020. It is required that the conduct of the election aligns with the key principles of COVID-19 risk management, developed by DOH.

The guidelines and requirements in this document have been developed to decrease the risk of the spread of COVID-19 associated with election activities in remote communities.

The guidelines apply to all Northern Territory Electoral Commission (NTEC) staff travelling to remote communities.

Context

NTEC staff must travel to remote communities to conduct electoral awareness, education and enrolment activities, and to deliver mobile voting services. Enrolment and education field programs resumed in June 2020, following the lifting of travel restrictions to remote communities under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (Cth).

Despite the lifting of the restrictions, NTEC staff travelling to remote communities will be required to adhere to protocols and guidelines developed by NTEC. This will assist in decreasing the risk of introducing or spreading COVID-19 in remote communities.

Mobile voting begins two weeks before election day. Mobile voting centres can operate in larger communities for up to two days and smaller communities for as little as 30 minutes.

Guiding Principles

These are general principles developed by DOH that apply to all Territorians. The NTEC will use the guiding principles to assist in the delivery of the 2020 Territory Election.

Physical distancing

- A minimum space of 1.5 metres between people who aren't from the same household.
- If there is a requirement to be facing another person less than 1.5 metres away, minimise contact to less than 15 minutes.

Hygiene

- Avoid touching your face and cough or sneeze into a tissue or into your elbow.
- Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before and after any contact with surfaces that are used by more than one person.
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces that are touched by more than one person – e.g. phones, door handles, benches, equipment.
- Avoid sharing implements e.g. cups or objects that you touch.

Staff who feel unwell or are showing symptoms are instructed to not attend a workplace, including a voting centre.

Protocols for delivering mobile voting in remote locations

The following protocols have been developed to ensure the 2020 Territory Election complies with the guiding principles outlined above. They are required to assist in reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Travel

- NTEC staff will travel by vehicle or commercial light aircraft to remote locations. The vehicles and privately chartered aircraft will transport, apart from the pilot, only NTEC staff. This ensures that only those necessary to deliver mobile voting will enter a remote location.
- On arrival by air to a remote community, the local council will generally arrange a vehicle and driver to pick up NTEC staff from the air strip and drive them to the community, if it is a considerable distance from the airstrip. NTEC will liaise with local councils before visiting the community to request only one council employee (the driver) is in the vehicle – and to use the same vehicle for both pick-up and drop-off.
- Often aircraft pilots are required under their company's policy to access an air-conditioned facility in between flights to rest. Where this is required, the NTEC will work with the local council to identify a suitable facility, and ensure the pilot is provided with a separate room, or a rest area a minimum of 1.5m from other users of the facility. Pilots will be instructed to minimise contact with the community.

Accommodation

- Accommodation for NTEC staff will be arranged before arrival in a community. Accommodation options vary depending on the location, and range from hotel, motel, and roadhouse or donga-style accommodation. Some teams will be based at one location and use the same accommodation and room throughout the travel period, while other teams will be required to change accommodation most days depending on their schedules.
- NTEC staff will be required to minimise contact with the community unless performing essential tasks including consuming meals or purchasing items. Where essential tasks are to occur, staff are required to adhere to social distancing and hygiene guidelines.

Mobile voting

- Social distancing will be practised.
- A hygiene officer will clean surfaces that are regularly touched, including tables and voting screens. A clear film will be placed on top of voting screens to allow them to be cleaned easily.
- Single use pencils will be made available to voters.
- Hand sanitiser will be offered to voters at entry and exit points.
- NTEC staff will be required to regularly use hand sanitiser and wash their hands with soap and water.
- All indoor mobile voting locations will be assessed to determine their suitability to comply with social distancing and to comply with one person per 4 square metres. Where a suitable indoor location cannot be sourced, an outdoor mobile voting site will be identified.
- Monitor the number of people inside voting and counting centres to ensure there is compliance with social distancing principles. This includes ensuring all people and voting screens are at least 1.5 metres apart.
- Ensure only one voter uses a voting screen at a time in accordance with Section 87 of the *Electoral Act (2004)*, except when an elector needs assistance to vote.
- If an elector needs assistance with voting and there is a requirement to be facing another person closer than 1.5 metres, contact will be minimised to less than 15 minutes.
- NTEC staff will use eLAPPS, an electronic electoral roll system, to allow them to look up and mark-off the electoral roll more quickly which will reduce queuing.
- A tablet is available containing a one-minute how to vote video message in 14 languages. Tablet surfaces will be cleaned regularly. This will mean fewer local assistants will be required at mobile voting locations.
- Recent legislative changes allows eligible electors to enrol and vote at the voting centre even if they are not on the electoral roll (using a declaration vote). This will be of benefit where an enrolment drive has not been able to occur due to COVID-19.
- Signage will remind electors to socially distance and leave the venue if they are unwell.
- A media campaign will run to encourage electors to practise social distancing while voting.

Unwell NTEC staff

- NTEC staff will be required to undertake a pre-departure self-risk assessment before they travel, to determine whether they are showing symptoms or have been exposed to people with a high risk of exposure to COVID-19. They will be required to submit the pre-departure self-risk assessment to the NTEC. They will not be allowed to travel if they feel unwell, are displaying symptoms or are considered high risk e.g. have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case.

- NTEC staff will be required to self-monitor for symptoms and if symptoms develop they will be required to self-isolate at their accommodation. NTEC staff will be required to contact their remote team leader, the national COVID19 hotline (1800 020 080) or local health authorities and follow their advice. Refer to the full protocol document titled *Suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19* for a full list of actions to take.
- NTEC will follow the advice of DOH staff and evacuate affected staff member/s if required. In the event that an evacuation is required, all efforts will be made to arrange a replacement official or team to continue with the delivery of mobile voting.

Training and education

- NTEC staff travelling to remote locations are required to attend a briefing in the week leading up to the commencement of mobile voting. The briefing will cover the guidelines and requirements to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19.
- Relevant documents and procedures will be provided to NTEC staff.