

**FAQ**  
**Contra Costa County**  
**November 3, 2020 Election**

**Q: I'm concerned about election security. Should I worry that my ballot may not be counted accurately?**

A: No, Contra Costa voters can be confident that their ballots will be collected and counted with an extremely high level of security and accuracy. We program and meticulously test each machine, which counts ballots to ensure all votes are accurately counted.

**Q: What specific steps are the County taking to ensure election cybersecurity?**

A: We train all our employees to deal with hostile spear phishing attacks intended to attack our voting systems. We engage with State and Federal government cyber security agencies to ensure we have hardened our electronic infrastructure and have effective policies and practices in place. None of our ballot counting equipment is ever connected to the internet. We constantly practice good cyber hygiene.

**Q: Can someone vote twice or cast my ballot?**

A: Our processes and technology are constantly ensuring that no one votes more than once. Once a voter votes, systems are updated and flag a person attempting to vote twice. Each voter must sign their Vote by Mail ballot envelope, which we compare against their registration signature on file. Every signature is compared and if there is a discrepancy, it is escalated to a supervisor. If a ballot comes in without a signature or is unable to be authenticated, we contact the voter to correct the issue.

**Q: I've seen news stories about "fake" ballot drop boxes. How do I know which ballot drop boxes are official and why is it safe to use one?**

A: Voters should look for one of our 37 official boxes, which are painted white, clearly labeled with the County logo and have our phone number and a box number on each box. A list and addresses are in the Voter Information Guide and on our website [here](#). There have been no reports of unofficial drop boxes in Contra Costa County. Drop boxes are emptied daily by a team of two Elections Division staff, and voters can be confident that their ballots are securely and efficiently processed.

**Q: When will we know the results of the election?**

A: We begin reporting unofficial election results just after 8 pm on Election Day. The first report is for the Vote by Mail ballots that were received through the day before Election Day. Although ballots are processed ahead of the polls closing, we do not total and report them until election night at 8:00 pm. Unofficial results will continue to be updated about every half hour from 9:30 pm until all results from polling places are received and updated, which is usually between 11:30 pm and 1:00 am.

On the day after the election, we begin processing all of the Vote by Mail ballots received on Election Day and those with a postmark on or before Election Day, as well as provisional ballots. Depending on how many voters wait to the last days to return their ballot, the count may continue for 3 – 7 days. This is the official canvass and is a very time-intensive process. Once all ballots have been counted and reported, we audit and verify the results which includes counting thousands of ballots by hand.

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**Q: I want to vote in person. What measures are in place to keep polling places safe?**

A: All County COVID protocols are in effect to include masks and social distancing, as well as respecting room capacity limitations. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is always required by our staff, our volunteers, and our voters. If a voter does not have PPE, we will have it available so they can vote. All voting equipment and supplies are disinfected regularly throughout the day.

We will have a designated worker outside the entry to each polling place who will meter the access to the facility. They will have hand sanitizer and masks available for voters.

Only a limited number of people will be allowed in each voting location at any time; this number depends on available space and includes staff, volunteers, voters, and observers. Transparent and safe voting is our primary focus, so the number of observers in a location may be limited to accommodate voting.

Voters will remain at least six feet apart and will be reminded with signage designating appropriate spacing. Voters will queue outside the voting location, even in undesirable weather. We recommend that in-person voters remain patient and come prepared with jackets and umbrellas, if appropriate. We encourage voters to return the ballot we mailed to them and avoid in-person voting, unless necessary.

**Q: What happens if there are disruptions at my polling place?**

A: We are committed to an open and transparent voting process. Poll watchers and observers, who are allowed and encouraged, cannot interfere with the voting process. If an observer or watcher is disruptive, our Polling Place Inspector will ask them to cease the behavior. If the situation escalates further, law enforcement will be notified and requested to respond.

**Q: I'm worried that the USPS may not return my ballot on time. What can I do to make sure the County gets my ballot in time?**

A: As long as the ballot is postmarked by Election Day, it is considered timely if received by November 20<sup>th</sup>. To avoid that risk, we have provided 37 drop boxes throughout the County so voters can return their ballots directly to the Elections Division.

**Q: A couple of members of my household do not speak English. How can they vote?**

A: All voting materials, including voter registration forms, ballots, instructions, information pamphlets, and website information, are available in English, Spanish, and Chinese in Contra Costa County. Language tools in Hindi, Korean, Laotian, Nepali, Panjabi, Tagalog, Tamil, Telugu, and Vietnamese are available at in-person voting sites for those who need this service. We try to have workers who speak languages other than English available at in-person voting site.

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**Q: What accessibility measures are in place at polling places?**

A: We've made every effort to select polling places that are accessible to all voters. An accessible ballot marking device is available at every polling place and has features to assist voters in reading and marking a ballot independently. Contra Costa County trains poll workers on accessibility sensitivity and responses. Poll workers assist voters as requested and can facilitate curbside voting. We follow state and federal guidelines to ensure our website is accessible to voters with disabilities.

**Q: Should I expect long lines at polling places?**

A: Yes, you should expect lines at in-person voting locations. While we hope that voters will vote early and mail their ballots or drop them at one of our drop boxes, those who vote in-person are likely to encounter lines at early voting sites and polling places. We recommend that voters come prepared to wait, to bring their sample ballots (pre-marked to save time), wear layers, and be patient. With a limited number of people allowed in our polling places due to personal distancing, most lines will be outside in the elements, especially at our smaller facilities.

**Q: If lines at polling places are still long at 8pm, will everyone be allowed to vote?**

A: If a voter is in line when the polls close, they will be allowed to vote, and there is no time limit if they were in line at 8:00 pm. If they are not in line at 8:00 pm, they will not be allowed to vote. We encourage voting by mail to avoid lines at polling places.

**Q: What is the latest date that a ballot can be submitted by mail or in a drop box?**

A: Ballots must be postmarked by November 3<sup>rd</sup> or dropped in a drop box, polling place, or the main office in Martinez by 8:00 pm on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Drop boxes are secured at 8:00 pm and no additional ballots will be collected. All ballots postmarked by November 3<sup>rd</sup> and received by November 20<sup>th</sup> will be counted. Voters can be confident that ballots will be collected efficiently and counted accurately.