

How to vote safely amid a pandemic

By Cynthia Jumper and Ruth E. Berggren FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS



Voting is good for your health. Texas doctors want to keep it that way.

It may seem self-evident that poor health reduces voter turnout, but it may also be true that voting can improve your health. Studies about the health impact of civic engagement, including

Voters wear protective masks and practice social distancing in Boston earlier this month. Soon, Texans will have the opportunity to vote safely during the pandemic. It can be done. Scott Eisen / Bloomberg

voting, suggest that people who vote have stronger social networks, better mental health and fewer risky health behaviors later in life. Could voting help you live longer? Wouldn't the opposite be true in the middle of a deadly pandemic?

As physicians, we spend a great deal of our time educating others about evidence-based healthy behaviors. As president and president-elect of the Texas Chapter of American College of Physicians, we speak on behalf of our colleagues expressing concern about the safety of voting in the 2020 general election. Politics aside, engagement in this year's elections has short-term and long-term health implications, both for our communities and as individuals. It is critical that we vote, and that we keep our communities healthy.

Here are our recommendations to safely vote this fall:

1. Get a flu shot before you vote. Flu shots don't prevent coronavirus, but they do save lives.
2. Contact your local election administrator to check if you are eligible to vote by mail.
3. Mail-in voters may also drop off ballots in person at your county-of-residence election headquarters. You will need to bring your voter ID (and hand sanitizer). The deadline for receipt of mail-in votes is Election Day, Nov. 3.
4. Avoid crowds by voting early between Oct. 13-30. To learn if you are registered, where to vote early, and plan your ballot selections, head to [votetexas.gov](https://www.votetexas.gov).

5. Prepare your ballot choices before voting, so you can get in and out quickly, reducing your indoor exposure time.
6. Don't go out to vote if you feel sick. Stay home, get a COVID-19 test or call your doctor.
7. Wear a good face mask to protect everyone's health, and be considerate of the health and safety of Texas election officials. They put themselves at risk for our democracy, and many risk bad outcomes from COVID-19. Don't ask them to get close to your face or into your car to help you with curbside voting.
8. Be prepared if you must stand in line — bring a light snack, water and hand sanitizer. Wear sunscreen if you will be outside, or bring an umbrella to help protect you from the sun. If standing for any length of time will be difficult, bring a foldable chair.
9. After you vote, pat yourself on the back: for voting safely, and for improving your own health through civic engagement in spite of a deadly pandemic.

Cynthia Jumper, M.D., MPH, MACP, is the president of the Texas Chapter of the ACP Critical Care Medicine. Ruth E. Berggren, M.D., MACP, is the president-elect of the Texas Chapter of the ACP Infectious Disease.