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Subject: 3/25 COVID-19 Update for Election Stakeholders - CDC Telecon - Abbreviated Transcript
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[EIS CDC-USPS Telecon Abbreviated Summary 2020 03 25 FINAL.pdf](#)

Election Partners,

For those of you who were able to join last Wednesday's Elections COVID-19 Update from CDC and USPS, we thank you for joining us. We apologize to those who weren't able to join for the technical difficulties we experienced due to unanticipated demand. We are working on a high-volume conference bridge solution to avoid future technical difficulties.

Please find the attached abbreviated transcript of last week's call.

We thank you again for your patience and flexibility as we continue to host these calls. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to (b)(6)

Respectfully,

EI SSA

EI SSA/ESI, National Risk Management Center

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency

Email: (b)(6)



**Election Infrastructure Subsector
Initial CDC and USPS Election Partner Teleconference
Abbreviated Summary**

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

Opening Comments:

- Co-Chaired by DHS/CISA (Matt Masterson) and EAC (Commissioner Hovland).
- Telecon agenda overview by Chairs:
 - Also joined by (b)(6) Community Intervention Task Force Lead & (b)(6) MSPH from Center for Disease Control (CDC) and (b)(6) Election Mail Manager from the United States Postal Service (USPS).
 - Caution that we continue to see phishing attempts and other targeted cyber attempts trying to take advantage of this situation. So, please be aware of what is being sent to you, and by whom, and take the necessary steps to secure your networks appropriately.
 - Purpose of call is to address the election community and allow a forum to voice concerns the election officials are facing while preparing for their upcoming primaries and the November general election.

Discussion:

- CDC Team provided COVID-19 status updates, guidance, and took Q&A as follows:
- Highlights:
 - For polling places, must maintain hand hygiene practices, social distancing, and care with the number of voters and poll workers at sites in same timeframe to avoid crowding.
 - Reminded all that CDC has election specific information, to include for polling locations, available online at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.
 - Stated they don't believe that licking of envelopes is of great transmission concern to election workers processing them but think we should continue to look into alternate methods of wetting seals at voter end and opening. Practice frequent hand hygiene with handling envelopes if concerned.
- Comments:
 - On question of asymptomatic voters/poll workers and how to handle-they reinforced hygiene and social distancing, just in case, until more is known.
 - Polling pads and stylus protocols – CDC not familiar in detail with this technology but reinforced periodic cleaning/disinfection with appropriate solutions (check with manufacturer or consider alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol) and distancing during voting.

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- Community Intervention Task Force help develops voting and defense section guidance.
 - Guidance for cleaning and disinfecting polling places is on the CDC website.
 - Managing lines, try to keep 6 feet in between people, managing the interaction between poll workers and the public, and people that would be coming in to vote is important.
 - Making sure that you have products on hand, like alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and handwashing stations for people to be able to keep themselves safe.
 - Also understanding that many people that work in polling places are members of the high-risk category.
 - Limiting the number of people, like kids or others, that can come in with voters.
 - Adding communicative messages and posters around election offices and polling places that reinforce social hygiene, etc.
- CDC Q&A:
 - Q1. Whether CDC has taken a formal position, or plan to take some form of public guidance on Vote by Mail (VBM) and specifically around the licking of envelopes and the transmission of COVID? Is this something we should be worried about?
 - A1. CDC does not believe that licking the envelopes is of great concern. However, there are alternative ways in which to moisten the envelopes. So, if you are at all concerned about people who have licked envelopes, advise people to do it differently and promote hand hygiene. In terms of our recognizing moving to VBM, any opportunity that you have to keep people out of areas where they are going to congregate putting either themselves or others at risk, is good. At the same time, we also want to make sure that people have the opportunity to vote, and that nothing is put in place that would then prevent people, who would normally be able to vote, from voting. This is a state or local decision, to be discussed at that level so that appropriate ability to vote is maintained.
 - Q2. Thoughts on asymptomatic patients and guidance or advice around people who may not actually feel ill but may; any possible ways to either educate or protect against the spread of the virus recognizing this factor.
 - A2. Still one of the main questions that we are trying to understand. I think that people across the world dealing with this pandemic are trying to understand. I think that any of the infection control practices that we put into place other than particularly around cleaning, other than the ones that say stay at home if you are symptomatic would be applicable here. So just making

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sure that you are maintaining appropriate distance, you are cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces, all of those practices are important, regardless of whether you actively know someone is sick or not in your polling place.

- Q3. Thomas County in Kansas. For those of us that use poll pads for the voter to sign in, we have a stylus at each poll pad, do you have recommendations on not using those. Or just wiping those down after each use?
- A3. [CDC speaker reiterated that they were not election equipment experts.] Generally, it is a great idea to try and wipe those down after each transaction or as often as feasible. Especially when people are handling them. Again, you have to be a little careful about electronics and what types of disinfectants you can use to not damage them. A lot of times you can get information for that from the device manufacturer. But again, going back to my original comment, one of the most important work things is just hand hygiene. So not just for the poll workers, but for the public after they drop off their ballots, or vote, or whatever, to clean their hands with soap and water or sanitizer.
- Q4. Does CDC have a general projection for the sort of curve for the virus and if or when we might reach the highpoint? Recognizing that there are primary elections happening throughout April, May, and June but also for preparation for the November elections? Your scientific projection of the current state of things and out to November?
- A4. CDC deferred on answering that question as it can't be effectively answered yet. CDC understands the degree of anxiety that COVID-19 is imposing. Whatever preparations you can make to think about the pandemic extending, certainly the next few months, will be helpful.
- Q5. (b)(6) NASED. You mentioned that you don't think that licking envelopes would be a means of transmission but what about on paper in general?
- A5. CDC feels it comes back to hand hygiene. We do not view paper as a massive transmission route in this setting. CDC not telling national libraries to disinfect their books and things like that. So not really worried about someone handing paper to you. Again, the actionable thing that can be done is providing good hand sanitizing materials for the people to disinfect with.
- Q6. (b)(6) Rocklin County, NY. You talked a little about the poll pads. I don't foresee how we can use those poll pads and not have the inspectors and voters within a six-foot radius. They both have to interact with the poll pads.

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- A6. [CDC speaker reiterated that they were not election equipment experts.] Try to think creatively about how you could set up that distance so that it would work. The other option is it might make sense to figure out what an alternative might be? Also, really the concern around transmission from people close to each other is really about extended amounts of time. So, if you can have task separation, that can be helpful as well.
 - Q7 (b)(6), NASS. It sounds like to me, people are asking about the poll pads, and stylus because they are going to be touched, with every transaction. But it sounds like you are more concerned with people coming into close contact with one another than on surfaces? The poll pad would be similar to using an ATM machine if you are touching the screen. You have to wipe it down every single time someone uses it. Or are you more concerned about the person-to-person interaction?
 - A7. Great point. Social distancing is really separate but equal in terms of their interaction, surface cleaning helps with any shared transmission through shared objects. With all of it, from a voting experience, separating as much as possible and practicing hygiene. Setting up strategic stations, where they could sanitize their hands after touching an object, etc. maybe as they come and leave. It could be easily managed through a system, it is just an issue of dealing with the volume of people that are coming through to vote.
- USPS Election Mail Program Manager, (b)(6) provided thoughts as follows:
 - Highlights:
 - Asked Election Officials to stay coordinated with his Election Mail Area Leads and Coordinators, especially with Vote By Mail (VBM) transitions.
 - Also, work closely with USPS mail piece design experts to ensure compatibility with USPS automation processes.
 - Was asked by Iowa Secretary of State (b)(6) about lowering postal rates to non-profit level. He will take that back to HQ for discussion.
 - Comments:
 - (b)(6), Election Mail Program Manager, USPS. Thank you for inviting me today and thank you to the CDC for their diligent effort to keep us informed in an evolving situation.
 - Postal Service to Election Official outreach efforts:
 - Election Mail District Coordinators outreach to Boards of Election is ongoing, focusing on states with upcoming primaries. We've started our second outreach pass for states that have already had primaries.

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- State Election Executives, as you scale up vote by mail efforts in response to COVID-19 please contact your designated Area Lead to discuss your plans. The list of Area Leads and District Level Coordinators was shared on Monday with the EAC, NASS, and NASED
 - We are coordinating with printers, EAC, NASS, and NASED.
 - We are ready and available to support you on a state and local level.
 - We have Election Mail preparation and mailing education information online usps.com/electionmail.
 - Prepaid return mail postage options:
 - Please contact your Postal Service Area Lead to discuss.
 - Note: Legislative action and funding may be required in your state.
 - Ballot envelope design verification:
 - Please have every election mail envelope design reviewed and approved by a USPS Mailpiece Design Analyst.
- USPS Q&A - (b)(6):
 - Q1. Any concerns about the impact of the virus on the USPS workforce, and the increase in the VBM activity and the ability to hand that?
 - A1. Both very good questions.
 - We are taking steps to minimize the effects. Everything that was discussed on this call is being implemented throughout the USPS.
 - We are capable of handling and scaling for increased volume. My concern is not the volume. We want to make sure that every mail piece is going to comply with our mailing standards and is automation-compatible.
 - Q2. Question on delivery of ballots and absentee applications. Any advice you can give us that would help us minimize that because we have a significant delay on everything being dumped into the system on the same day. Is there any kind of advice that the USPS would give as far as breaking that into multiple days when we mail out all the absentee applications/ballots?
 - A2. Please work with your Area Lead and District Coordinator so they can ensure that they have the appropriate staffing levels when the mail is inducted.
 - Q3. Iowa Secretary of State (b)(6). Any chance to get the rate lowered to non-profit level, or some kind of reduction at least? I know we have asked you in the past couple days, or let the feds figure out how to pay it, some of these mail costs. But is there at least an opportunity to get the rate reduced to the non-profit level?
 - A3. The Postal Service's prices for Market Dominant products, including First Class Mail, Marketing Mail, and Nonprofit Marketing Mail, are subject to statutory and regulatory pricing rules. The prices for these products are set in advance, are subject

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- to a variety of requirements (including a strict price cap) and cannot change without prior review by the Postal Regulatory Commission. Election Mail is not a separate rate category and is instead subject to the established rates for the class of mail for which postage has been paid. As a result, the Postal Service cannot unilaterally set “lower” rates for Election Mail.
- Election officials may send Election Mail at the established Marketing Mail or Nonprofit Marketing Mail rates, to the extent permitted by state and Federal law. However, they should be aware that this class of mail has a slower delivery standard than First Class Mail.
 - Q4. Saint Louis Park, MN. Is there any reason to be concerned about the possible bankruptcy of USPS? Impacts? Maybe increasing delivery times? I know this has been discussed in the media.
 - A4. The Postal Service is working through the COVID-19 event. We are focused on protecting our employees, our customers, and the mail. We are adjusting our operations as needed to meet the changing circumstances of the event. Any service disruptions will be posted to our USPS Service Alerts website found at <https://about.usps.com/newsroom/service-alerts/>.
 - Q5. (b)(6), Registrar of Voters, East Baton Rouge Parish, LA. We are hearing that the USPS is not delivering mail to retirement communities, and I am hearing that is problematic for others as well. Have you given direction to postal carriers regarding delivery to these types of communities?
 - A5. The Postal Service is working with retirement communities, nursing homes, and others to ensure there is no disruption to their service while protecting the employees, the customers, and the mail. More information is available at <https://about.usps.com/newsroom/service-alerts/>.
 - Q6. Thomas County, KS. We have the same issue as Baton Rouge except that ours is ballots being mailed out to colleges and universities. They are not being delivered.
 - A6. Most colleges and universities manage their own mail operation. Forwarding to students not on campus would be done by them.
- Closing:
 - (b)(6), EAC. Thank you (b)(6). Certainly, appreciate on the last call there were questions around funding, welcome any of those people may have. Appreciate everyone getting on the call. Have a good day.



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