

Media responses – secure telephone voting

Topline talking points

- Telephone voting has been introduced as an emergency measure and is strictly only for people who have tested positive to COVID after 6pm on the Tuesday evening before polling day.
- It will be available from 8.30am Thursday 19 May.
- People who tested positive from Saturday 14 May until then should apply for a postal vote.
- To access the service electors must prove their eligibility and must have registered their positive COVID-19 test – either a PCR or RAT – with their state or territory health authority. This is a mandatory requirement.
- Images of the ballot papers will be available for voters to view on the AEC website, to ensure those voting by telephone are able to complete the process as easily as possible.
- Voter verification will work the same for telephone voting as any other method – voters will not be required to present identification in order to have their vote marked against the electoral roll. Voters will be making a legal declaration about their identity, as they do when voting in person or by post, and that they have not previously voted in this election.
- Previously, telephone voting was limited to voters who are blind or have low vision with just over 2,000 votes taken via telephone in 2019.
- It is an emergency measure only and there will likely be long wait times to vote with this service.
- Anyone who is able to visit a polling place should do so. There are more COVID-19 safety measures in place than your trip to the local shops – so you can feel safe to turn up and vote.

How secure telephone voting works

How will telephone voting work?

There's two steps for secure telephone voting.

First, people register to use the service on the AEC website. Voters will need to provide evidence of being COVID-19 positive and make a declaration about their eligibility.

Once the registration form has been submitted, people will get a registration number sent by SMS or email. When they call to cast their vote, people will quote this registration number rather than their name and address to protect the secrecy of their vote.

If people don't have internet access, they can register over the phone. But we expect the vast majority to register online.

We're asking people to visit the AEC website and look at an image of the ballot papers and consider their preferences before calling to vote. This will help make the voting process quicker and reduce wait times for the service.

Then they will call 1800 413 960. They quote their registration number and a call centre operator will record the vote.

How do people prove they're COVID-19 positive?

People can only use the telephone voting service if they have registered their positive COVID-19 test – either a PCR or RAT – with their state or territory health authority. They'll also need to provide evidence of their PCR, such as date and time of positive test result, or evidence of their RAT, such as serial number.

How can close contacts vote?

Close contacts no longer need to isolate. This means they can attend a polling place to vote in person. We expect they will follow local health authority guidelines and take appropriate COVID-19 safety measures.

What happens if a close contact has COVID-19 symptoms?

The AEC is recommending people plan their vote. If people don't think they will be able to vote in person on election day, they may be eligible to apply for a postal vote or attend one of our early voting centres. If a family member has COVID-19 in the week before the election, close contacts may consider voting early in case they become symptomatic.

How will COVID-19 positive people know about the service?

The AEC is running a voter services campaign, which explains to people their voting options if they don't think they will be able to vote in person on election day. This is available in up to 33 languages.

In addition, everyone who registers a positive COVID-19 test result with their state or territory government will receive information on how to vote while in isolation. State and territory COVID-19 web pages and call centres will also direct people to the AEC website to check their voting options.

What are the operating hours?

Online registration Opens Closes	Wednesday 18 May	6.01pm AEST
	Saturday 21 May	4pm AEST
Phone registration	Thursday 19 May	8.30am to 5.30pm local time
	Friday 20 May	8.30am to 5.30pm local time
	Saturday 21 May	8am local time to 4pm AEST
Phone voting	Thursday 19 May	8.30am to 5.30pm local time
	Friday 20 May	8.30am to 6pm local time
	Saturday 21 May	8am to 6pm local time

If a registered COVID-19 positive telephone voter is on the line when voting closes at 6pm on election day they will be able to cast their vote, just as is the case for people in the queue at 6pm at an election day polling place.

Integrity of the service

Does this open up the possibility of people voting twice?

No. As part of the registration process, the voter's name will be marked off the roll in real time. If the voter has already voted they will not be able to register.

Voters also have to make a declaration when they call to vote that they haven't voted before in this election.

How is the AEC ensuring electoral integrity given there will be non-AEC call centres taking votes?

All policies, procedures and training materials have been developed by the AEC in line with our existing election and call centre management procedures. As you'd expect, they're standardised, robust, and align with the electronically assisted voting provisions in the Electoral Act.

If pushed

All staff working on the call centre are employees of the Australia Public Service and have undertaken specific training for this service. They also must have signed a Political Neutrality disclosure, and there are offences in the Regulation and lawful declarations that the elector needs to make. Any breach is a criminal offence.

How is the service scrutineered?

Candidates and party-appointed scrutineers can observe the telephone voting process, as is the case with every voting process we deliver. This is an important part of the transparency of Australia's election delivery. Voters can request a scrutineer not to observe their phone call, if that's their preference.

The ballot paper handling requirements in call centres will be subject to the same stringent ballot paper handling and reconciliation requirements as in-person polling places.

Votes will only be counted following secure return to the relevant divisional offices, which is also conducted under scrutineer observation.

How will the secure telephone votes be counted?

After the close of voting on election day, all the envelopes will be sorted, reconciled and packed for secure dispatch to their home division. There, they'll be received, opened and the ballot papers counted.

Operation of the service

Who is delivering the call centre?

The secure telephone voting service is being managed by the Australian Electoral Commission, using a number of Commonwealth department call centres.

Operators, like all people involved in the delivery of the election, are required to sign a political neutrality declaration – a statement that they will undertake their duties with impartiality.

How many people do you think will cast a vote by phone?

COVID-19 case numbers continue to fluctuate. We're working closely with the Department of Health to model expected demand.

If pushed

The one thing we know is that COVID-19 is unpredictable. In saying that, if people are tracking the number of daily COVID-positive case numbers this should give them an idea of the number of calls we're expecting.

While experts are predicting numbers to plateau, we're building a service that will cater for above the expected demand, so that there's coverage if a new variant emerges or numbers unexpectedly rise in the week prior to the election.

If further pushed

We'll have approximately 7000 operators for this service. While a significant delivery scale has been stood up in a short time frame, we've been very upfront that the nature of the service will mean people may experience a wait.

How many how people voted by phone?

(From Sunday) XX people registered to vote by phone. We're still reconciling how many then called to cast their vote by phone.

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