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EC nod for filing nominations online

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Ahead of the Bihar Assembly poll, the Election Commission on Friday approved guidelines for conducting polls during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing public meetings and roadshows, subject to social distancing and other safety norms.

The broad guidelines for elections and byelections include allowing online submission of nomination

forms, affidavits and security amount, and limiting the number of people accompanying candidates for filing nomination to two.

For voters, the EC's guidelines include wearing of masks and gloves, and protective gear for polling staff.

On election meetings, the guidelines stated: "Public gatherings/rallies may be conducted subject to adherence to extant COVID-19 guidelines," while limiting

the number of people allowed for door-to-door campaigning to five, including the candidate.

The District Election Officer should identify dedicated grounds for the gatherings with entry and exit points marked clearly. "In all such grounds, the officer should, in advance, put markers to ensure social distancing by the attendees."

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The number of attendees should not exceed the State Disaster Management Authority's prescribed limit for public gatherings, the guidelines said. Roadshows should have convoys of five vehicles each, excluding security vehicles, separated by an interval of half an hour, instead of the existing 100 metre rule.

"Public meetings and road shows shall be permissible with suitable instructions subject to containment instructions issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs/State. Face mask, sanitizer, thermal scanners, gloves, face shield and PPE kits shall be used during the electoral process ensuring social distancing norms. Gloves shall be provided to all the electors for signing on the voter register and pressing button of EVM for voting," an EC statement said.

While masks are mandatory for voters, they would

be asked to lower the masks for identification when required. Sanitisers would be kept at the entry as well inside booths.

If an elector is found to have a fever, it would be checked a second time, and if the temperature is still high, they would be given a token number and asked to come back during the last hour of polling to cast their vote. Similarly, those electors suffering from COVID-19 would be allowed to cast their votes in the last hour of polling with preventive measures being followed.

The EC had invited suggestions from political parties till August 11 and taken them into account before issuing the guidelines, it said.

The Chief Electoral Officers of the States and Union Territories concerned would make comprehensive plans for the State, district and Assembly constituency level.