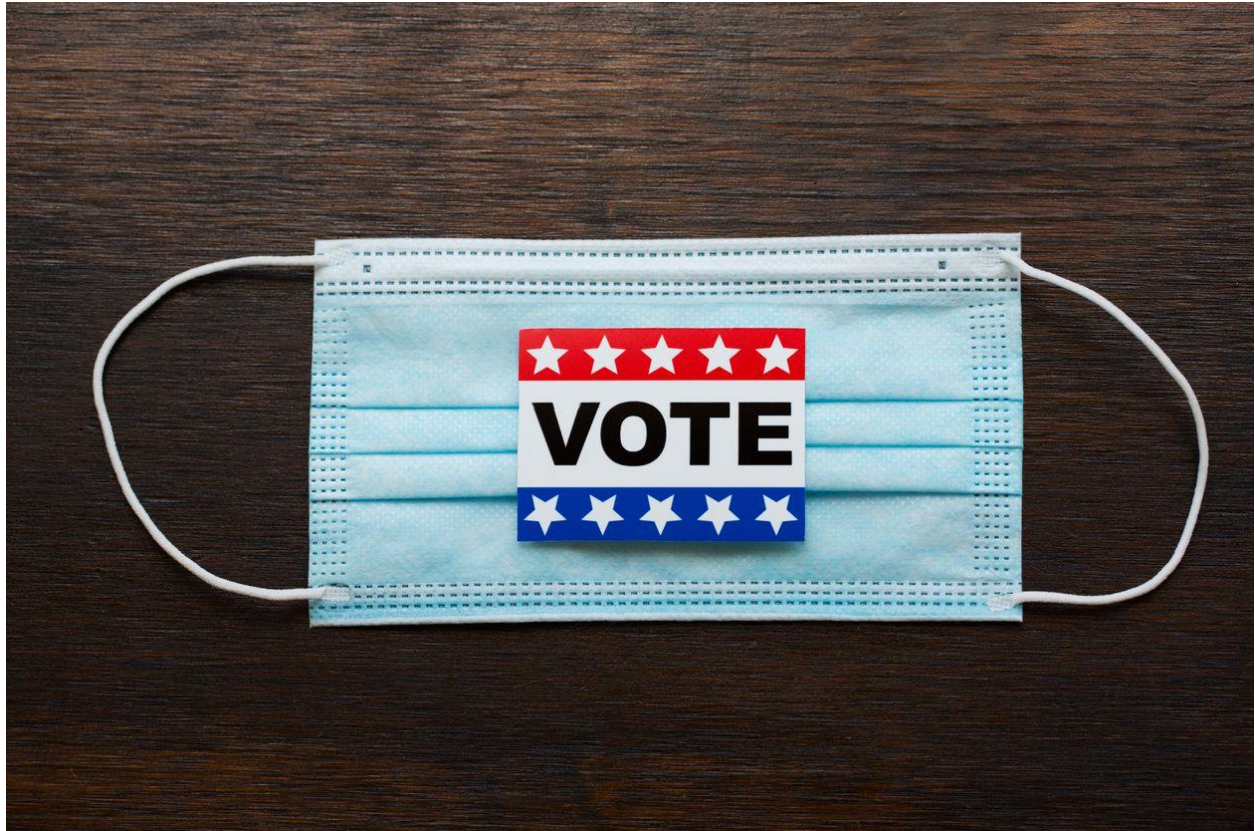


# Voting is good for your health, so long as you do it safely

Here's how to prepare to vote amid a pandemic



Vote sticker on face masks and American flags(tovfla / Getty Images/iStockphoto)

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 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 healthful behaviors. As Governor of the North Carolina Chapter of American College of Physicians, I speak on behalf of my Internal Medicine 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.

To avoid the health risk associated with going to the polls, consider voting by mail. All registered North Carolina voters can request an absentee ballot online. Ballots may be requested online at: <https://votebymail.ncsbe.gov/app/home> . Once you submit your absentee ballot, you can track it online through State Board of Elections' Ballottrax site: <https://northcarolina.ballottrax.net/voter/>.

If you plan to vote in person, here are 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. Avoid crowds by voting early. Early voting begins Thursday, October 15, and ends Saturday, October 31. You can find early voting sites in your county by going to: <https://vt.ncsbe.gov/ossite/>.
3. Prepare your ballot choices before voting, so you can get in and out quickly, reducing your indoor exposure time. You can view your sample ballot online by going to: <https://vt.ncsbe.gov/RegLkup/>
4. Don't go out to vote if you feel sick. Stay home, get a COVID-19 test or call your doctor.

5. Wear a good face mask to protect everyone's health and be considerate of the health and safety of our election officials and poll workers. 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.

6. Be prepared if you must stand in line. Bring a snack, water and hand sanitizer. Wear sunscreen if you will be outside or bring an umbrella to help protect you from the heat and sun. If standing for any length of time will be difficult, bring a folding chair.

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.

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