

Early Voting FAQ

1. What is the difference between absentee balloting and early voting? What does Minnesota have?

In absentee voting, a voter is required to fill out an application to receive an absentee ballot prior to Election Day. Depending upon whether the absentee voting is done by mail or in-person, the ballot will either be mailed out to the voter at the address indicated on the voter's application or will be given to the voter to complete while at the voting location. The voter must then follow the legally outlined process to submit the ballot, following the enclosed instructions to return a mail ballot to the elections office either via return mail or by drop off, or for in-person voting following the outlined procedures at the voting location.

Early voting operates nearly identically to Election Day voting, but occurs during a period prior to Election Day. Any qualified voter is able to cast a ballot during early voting. Most commonly, voters are able to go to one or more shared voting locations during early voting instead of a single assigned precinct like on Election Day.

In Minnesota, it is most accurate to say voters can vote early by in-person absentee ballot. Voters do need to fill out an absentee ballot application before getting a ballot when voting early in-person, however any Minneapolis voter can choose to go to any of the four Early Vote Center locations to cast their in-person absentee ballot, and during the final seven days before the election, they can now insert their ballot directly into a ballot tabulator instead of sealing it into a ballot envelope to be processed and counted later.

2. Why do we refer to absentee balloting as early voting, if it isn't really "early voting"?

While it is most accurate to say voters can vote early by in-person absentee ballot, most voters are more familiar with the concept of "early voting" and are primarily concerned with whether or not they have the option to go to a voting location and cast a ballot before Election Day. Early voting is not a legal term with a strict and consistent definition.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) recognizes Minnesota as one of 37 states plus the District of Columbia that offers some form of early voting to its residents.

Referring to the process available to Minnesota voters as "early voting" provides the clearest indication to the average voter that they can in fact cast a ballot at a voting location before Election Day.

3. How did absentee balloting change to enable us to be more closely aligned with early voting?

In 2014, the Minnesota Legislature updated the state's laws for absentee voting. The primary change was to allow any qualified voter to cast an absentee ballot, either by mail or in-person, without providing a reason or excuse for requesting a ballot. This removed one of the common main points of differentiation between absentee voting and early voting.

4. What is direct balloting, and how will that be different from absentee balloting and early voting?

The Minnesota Legislature made another change to state election law in 2016 potentially impacting the process followed by voters casting an absentee ballot in-person. Local jurisdictions now have the option to offer voters a choice during the final seven days before Election Day when casting an absentee ballot. In-person voters can now be allowed to insert their ballots directly into a ballot tabulator, instead of sealing them into an envelope to be processed and tabulated later. This moves the voting process even closer to what occurs on Election Day for voters, and allows them an

opportunity to see their ballots being tabulated and to receive notification by the tabulator of errors that may have been made on the ballot.

5. What happens to my ballot with absentee balloting? When, how, and by whom does it get processed and tabulated? What if I made a mistake?

Generally in absentee balloting, City staffers, election judges, and seasonal workers are the people that support absentee balloting. They prepare and process applications; verify the accuracy and completeness of voter data to accept or reject each absentee ballot; maintain accurate data in the State Voter Registration System; secure voted absentee ballots and provide chain-of-custody documentation; prepare absentee ballots for tabulation; and serve as members of the City's Absentee Ballot Board to process and tabulate ballots beginning seven days before Election Day. If you are voting by absentee ballot, the instructions include direction about what to do to get a replacement ballot if you notice you make a mistake on your ballot before you seal it into the series of required envelopes. Once you complete and submit your ballot, the absentee voting process does not provide any notification of any ballot errors or allow for corrections.

6. What happens to my ballot with direct balloting (early voting)? When, how, and by whom does it get processed and tabulated? What if I made a mistake?

With direct balloting, the several steps required to process absentee ballots after they are cast are eliminated, including the need to accept or reject each ballot, prepare the ballots for tabulation, and then process and tabulate the ballots. Instead, the voter is able to directly insert their ballot into the ballot tabulator. This also enables the voter to potentially be notified by the ballot tabulator of some mistakes, and gives the voter the option to get a replacement ballot to correct mistakes that may be found before the ballot is cast.

7. Why does Minneapolis have four early vote centers? Is there an advantage to having multiple locations? Can I get my absentee ballot at any of these locations, despite where I might live in the city ... or do I need to go to a specific location to get my absentee ballot?

In Minnesota, voters can go to their county election office to vote early by in-person absentee ballot. Cities and towns can also offer in-person absentee voting. In Minneapolis, we have chosen to offer four early vote centers to offer our voters maximum convenience and choice. Any Minneapolis resident can choose to go to any of the four locations. All locations have ballots available for all 132 precincts in Minneapolis.

8. How long does the early voting period last, and what are the hours of operation for the four early vote centers? What assistance can I get at those locations (as a voter)?

Early voting runs for 46 days. All early vote centers have identical service hours. Beginning Sept. 23, the centers will be open Monday through Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Extended hours will go into effect beginning Monday, Oct. 24. Those hours include weekday hours from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. and weekend hours on Saturdays from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. and Sundays from noon until 5 p.m. The final day for in-person early voting will be Monday, Nov. 7, from 7 a.m. until 5 p.m.

Voters can receive assistance at their request from a person of their choice or from staff to access the voting location, with interpretation, or with marking their ballots. Language assistance is available at all early vote centers. At a minimum, we have made commitments to ensure Hmong language assistance is always available at the North Early Vote Center, Spanish and Oromo language assistance is always available at the South Early Vote Center, Somali language assistance is always

available at the Downtown Early Vote Center, and Oromo and Amharic language assistance is always available at the Northeast Early Vote Center.

9. Are there other ways to participate before Election Day (i.e., vote-by-mail)? How do those other options work?

Voters can choose to vote by mail by requesting an absentee ballot and having it mailed out to them. An absentee ballot can be mailed to a Minnesota voter anywhere in the United States. Instructions and a postage-paid envelope will be included with the ballot. A voter can choose to complete their ballot and then mail it back using the postage-paid envelope, or the voter can drop their ballot off at the Elections & Voter Services office in City Hall. The voter can also have someone else, called an agent, drop off their ballot for them at the Elections & Voter Services office.

Voters serving in the military or living abroad can have a ballot sent to them anywhere in the world by filling out an online application available from our website. Hennepin County processes absentee ballots for voters overseas

10. Where can I get more information if I still have questions or concerns?

For more information or details about any of this information or other aspects of voting or elections, the elections website at vote.minneapolismn.gov is the most comprehensive resource available. Voters may also call 311 (dial 612-673-3000 outside of the City of Minneapolis) to get more information or to ask other questions.