

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Taylor County Judiciary

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the courts of Taylor County, Texas will implement the following protective measures:

General

1. All judges will comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals, and will use all reasonable efforts to conduct in-person proceedings according to the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration regarding social distancing, maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain communication with the local health authority and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary as conditions change and restrictions are relaxed or tightened by the Supreme Court of Texas, Court of Criminal Appeals and governing authorities.
4. Judges will set non-essential in-person proceedings once this operating plan is approved by the 7th Regional Administrative Judge.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when reasonable to do so.
2. Judge and Court Staff will self-monitor and report concerns or symptoms as appropriate.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°F, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 will be instructed not to enter the building and directed to seek medical advice.
4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings when going to and from their offices and in situations where they are in close contact with the public. They will practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations while performing their professional duties.

Scheduling

Court schedules have been established to reduce occupancy in the court building. Courts will continue to work together to stagger dockets and to limit in-person contact between staff, attorneys and litigants.

Vulnerable Populations

1. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose

immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered to be vulnerable populations.

2. Accommodations will be made for persons included in the vulnerable population to allow their attendance at court proceedings remotely.
3. A notice to those persons identifying themselves as members of the vulnerable population will be posted in conspicuous locations around the courthouse, at entrances, on the courts' websites, and will be included with setting notices. Such notice will direct that such persons contact the court so appropriate accommodations can be made.

Social Distancing

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be directed to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. Signage will be posted directing that no more than two individuals not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator. If more than one individual from the same household is in an elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the elevator.
3. Each restroom has been evaluated to determine the appropriate capacity to ensure social distancing and the maximum capacity has been posted on each restroom door.

Gallery

4. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
5. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

6. In each courtroom, to the extent possible, the location of the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space. Plexiglass dividers will be installed between the judge, witness, and court reporter. A plexiglass divider will be installed in front of the bench if there is less than six feet between the judge's chair and persons approaching the bench.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been or will be placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, outside of each courtroom, and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, and in the hallways.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, security personnel will ask the individuals if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building and be directed to contact the court for remote attendance options.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, security personnel will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the court building and be directed to contact the court for remote attendance options.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 99.6°F will not be transported to the court building.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided and will be directed to wear personal protective equipment.

Face Coverings

All individuals entering the court building will be directed to wear face coverings at all times. If the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable facemask will be provided.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies designed to be effective with this coronavirus.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.
3. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned every day.
4. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
5. Court staff will clean counsel table, the witness stand, and any other places where others were seated between hearings.

I have conferred with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and county judge. Correspondence confirming such consultation will be included when this plan is submitted to the Regional Administrative Judge. I will direct that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: May 15, 2020



Thomas M. Wheeler, Local Administrative District Judge