

COVID-19 Recommended Operating Plan for the El Paso County Statutory Probate Courts

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the Statutory Probate Courts of El Paso County, Probate Court No. 1 and Probate Court No. 2 will implement the following protective measures:

General

1. Both Probate Courts will begin non-essential, in-person proceedings no sooner than Monday, 6/1/2020.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°F or who have 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 not be permitted to enter the courthouse building and should seek medical advice.
2. Protective Measures: Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings while in the courtroom or in the courtroom offices, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times. Clean offices will be maintained by court staff at all times.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedule has been established to reduce occupancy in the courtrooms: In-person court hearings will be scheduled at a minimum of 20 minutes apart.

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. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by being authorized to attend a hearing remotely through one of the videoconferencing apps, such as GotoMeeting.

Social Distancing

1. Only essential parties, such as attorneys, clients and witnesses, will be allowed inside of the courtroom for a hearing. Parties on standby for other hearings must wait outside of the courtrooms in the lobby areas, adhering to social distancing and the wearing of face masks.

2. During the hearing process, attorneys and their clients will be asked to stay behind the courtroom counsel tables. Witnesses will be seated in the gallery in compliance with the gallery guidelines below.

Gallery

1. People seated in the gallery of the courtroom will be spaced 6 feet apart.
2. Adherence with appropriate social distancing in the courtroom will be continuously monitored and enforced by court staff.
3. A hall monitor in the lobby area of each floor is recommended in order to enforce the wearing of face masks and social distancing of at least 6 feet.

Well

3. In each courtroom, the following seatings have been arranged in such a way that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each occupied space: counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, clerk, court reporter, and bailiff

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer will be placed in the entrance of the courtrooms, as well as in the entrance of the courts' offices.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, either through the first floor or third floor entrances, security personnel will ask the individuals the following questions: if they are feeling feverish; if they have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; and if they 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 into the courthouse building.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, security personnel will also be using 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 courthouse building.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperatures taken prior to transport. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 99.6°F will not be transported to the court building.
4. The transport of inmates through civil courts for pending criminal court hearings is requested to be restricted.

Cleaning

1. Court staff will clean the courtrooms by wiping them down with cleaning supplies shown to be effective with the Coronavirus disease between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day that the courtroom is used.
2. Court staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
3. Court offices will be wiped down at a minimum daily.

Other

Marriages: Wedding parties will be limited to no more than 6 people, which includes the bride and groom.

Conclusion of Hearings: Attorneys and their clients will be asked to leave the courthouse building at the conclusion of their hearing if no further business is to be conducted at the courthouse.

Printing of Orders: Attorneys will be asked to provide hard copies of orders, as the Courts will be limiting the printing of documents.

Judge Patricia Chew and Judge Eduardo Gamboa shall conduct proceedings consistent with this Operating Plan.

Judge Patricia Chew

Judge Eduardo Gamboa

Date: 5/26/2020