

# **COVID-19 Operating Plan for Resumption of Jury Trials Collin County Court System**

*Effective Date: July 1, 2020*

This plan incorporates by reference all the terms, practices and protective measures in the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Courthouse Facilities Controlled by Collin County.

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of jurors, litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, Collin County will provide and recommend the following additional protective measures for the resumption of jury trials:

## **General**

1. The courts who share courthouse facilities have approved a rotating schedule for in-person proceedings, including jury trials.
2. County Courts at Law will directly summons 22 jurors to appear at the specified courtroom for the trial. This number is within the capacity for social distancing in the courtroom. The hallway will be marked for social distancing of the jurors until they are allowed into the courtroom.
3. District Courts will summons no more than 100 jurors to the Central Jury Room for voir dire for 1 case per day. The capacity of the Central Jury Room for Collin County is 600 persons. After the jury is selected in the Central Jury Room, the trial itself will take place in the courtroom with the practices outlined herein.

## **Juror and Court Staff Health**

4. Each prospective juror will have their temperature taken via a hand-held thermometer as they enter the courthouse, to ensure that no one with fever or an elevated temperature is admitted.
5. Once they enter the building and pass through the initial security screening, jurors will be directed to the central jury room and seated to achieve the maximum distancing possible.
6. Masks will be distributed, or jurors may wear their own when they enter the courthouse. Until the final jury is actually selected, seated and sworn, everyone appearing as a prospective juror will be required to wear a mask.
7. Latex gloves will be available for those who wish to wear them, but gloves are not required. If a juror would like gloves, they may ask the staff for them when they are seated in the Central Jury Room.
8. Microphones will be assigned to individual jurors for their sole use for at least the minimum number needed to cover the panel and strikes. To the extent there are more venire members than microphones, those least likely to be selected will share several microphones that will be sanitized between users.
9. The number of personal items juror may bring will be restricted to no more than they can hold in their lap at all times. Jurors will not be permitted to place personal items on surrounding chairs.

10. Hand sanitizer (alcohol based) will be available to jurors at multiple locations inside the courthouse and Central Jury Room, and jurors may ask Court Security Officers to make it available at their seat once they are selected to the final jury and seated in the courtroom.
11. The courtroom, jury room, and jury room bathrooms will be cleaned each evening when the court recesses, and this will continue throughout the trial.
12. Individual lunches will be provided to the selected jurors during each day of the trial to minimize any travel in and out of the Courthouse, and to minimize juror's interaction at local restaurants. Jurors are also free to bring their lunch.

### **Vulnerable Populations**

13. 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.
14. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for jury service may contact the jury services clerks and reschedule their jury service for a future time to be determined by the juror.

### **Social Distancing**

15. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the courtroom will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.

#### *Gallery*

16. 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.
17. Those selected to serve as jurors for the trial will be seated during the trial in the gallery of the courtroom, not the jury box, to achieve the maximum distancing possible. The gallery of the courtroom ordinarily seats 65.
18. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating will be staggered to promote social distancing.
19. The counsel tables for the courtroom have been moved to accommodate social distancing and the jurors being seated in the gallery instead of the jury box.
20. For District Court trials, the jury will deliberate in the courtroom, or an alternate courtroom. The existing jury deliberation room will not be used due to its size.

#### *Well*

21. In each courtroom, 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, where possible.
22. Plexiglas barriers will be installed in appropriate places in the courtroom.

## **Screening**

23. Jurors will be notified they may contact the jury clerks to reschedule their service if they:
- a) have been diagnosed by a licensed physician as having coronavirus anytime within the past 30 days;
  - b) are actively caring for a family member or loved one who has tested positive for the Coronavirus; or
  - c) are now in self-quarantine status and that status will continue during the date on their jury summons.

## **Other**

A copy of the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Courthouse Facilities Controlled by Collin County, the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Resumption of Jury Trials, and the attached juror letter addressing their upcoming jury service in the era of Coronavirus will all be posted on the Jury Services website for Collin County, as well as the websites for each County and District Court.