

# **COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Denton Municipal Court**

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 The City of Denton 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, including conducting 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 presiding judge of the municipal court will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and mayor and will adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020

## **Judge and Court Staff Health**

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements:
  - Continue to monitor directives and guidance from City of Denton leadership and Texas Office of Court Administration.
  - Ensure that all Court personnel are following COVID-19 precautions regarding social distancing measures and appropriate respiratory etiquette.
  - Follow the City of Denton COVID-19 Pandemic Safety Protocol for employee health monitoring.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0°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 not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice.
4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: Judges and court staff will follow CDC recommendations and plexiglass shields will be installed in the courtroom and the clerks windows as needed for the protection of the public and court staff.

## **Scheduling**

The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:

- Reasonable efforts regarding size and times of dockets will be made when scheduling dockets and hearings to adhere to the occupancy guidelines of the courtroom.
- Jury Trials will not resume until after July 1, 2020.

### **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. Each judge will include information on orders setting hearings, dockets notices, and in other communications notifying individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted on the courts' websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by special docket settings upon request.

### **Social Distancing**

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. Public common areas will be posted with appropriate signage requiring adherence to social distancing directives.

### ***Courtroom Gallery***

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

### ***Courtroom Well***

5. In the courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk and bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.

### **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the clerk windows, inside of the courtroom at the entry/exit doors and on the judges bench.
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 of the court building.

### **Screening**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court room, Bailiff or city 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 room.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court room, Bailiff or city 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 room.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including a face mask and gloves.

### **Face Coverings**

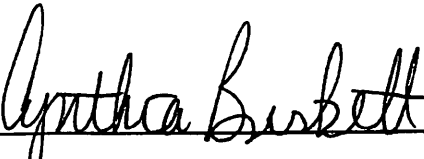
1. All individuals entering the court room will be required to wear face coverings at all times.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided on request if the supply is available.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court room for over 1 hour will be provided a disposable face masks and required to wear them while in the court room if the supply is available.

### **Cleaning**

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least daily. The Clerk windows will be cleaned every 2-3 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

I have conferred with all judges of this court regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and mayor, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of this court covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: May 26, 2020

  
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Assistant Judge of Denton Municipal Court