

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Hamilton 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 **Hamilton County** 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. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
3. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
4. After exhausting all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely, Judges may begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020.
5. Judges may suspend non-essential in-person proceedings to a date past June 1, 2020, so long as they remain in compliance with Texas Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeals COVID-19 emergency orders.

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: Judges and Court Staff will self-monitor in accordance with this operating plan.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.4°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 always practice social distancing and appropriate hygiene recommendations. Face coverings are recommended but any requirement to wear a face covering will be determined by each judge and elected official.
5. Protective Measures: as approved and modified by Commissioners Court.

Scheduling

1. Courts will make reasonable efforts to allow appearance by remote access and established a court schedule to reduce occupancy in the entire court building. Court schedules are in consideration of the current size of each Judge's dockets and ability to limit the number of people in the room at one time.
2. No Courts will conduct proceedings in the shared courtroom on the same day.

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 (a copy of which is attached as *Exhibit 1*).
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by being allowed to appear remotely or rescheduling the hearing for a date after August 1, 2020.

Social Distancing

1. All persons will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. No more than one individual will be permitted in an 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.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

Gallery

5. 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 a bailiff, court staff, or the judge.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

7. 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.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been 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" will be posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

Screening

1. A medical screening notice and questionnaire will be posted at the courthouse door with appropriate court contact information to report any "Yes" answer. *Exhibit 2*.

2. When individuals attempt to enter the court room, a law enforcement officer or emergency management technician (EMT) 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.
3. When individuals attempt to enter the court room, a law enforcement officer or emergency management technician (EMT) may use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.4°F will be refused admittance to the court room.
4. Inmates will appear via Zoom videoconferencing unless physical appearance is required by law. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature 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.
5. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building, or court room, will be provided personal protective equipment, including face shield, face mask, and gloves.

Face Coverings

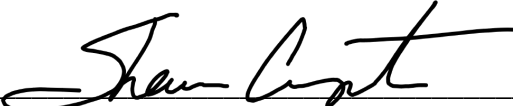
1. All individuals entering the court building are encouraged to wear face coverings. Each Judge may require face coverings as part of the courtroom dress code.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be available if requested.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every four to eight hours, as necessary.
2. On days with court hearings, the Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms and bathrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court personnel will be provided cleaning supplies to disinfect any microphones between each user.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
5. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

I have attempted to confer 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, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 5/21/2020


Shaun Carpenter
220th District Local Administrative District Judge

“EXHIBIT 1”

NOTICE TO VULNERABLE POPULATION

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.

Individuals that identify themselves as a vulnerable individual, or their attorney, shall contact the court coordinator at least 48 hours prior to the scheduled hearing and request accommodations or a continuance.

220th District Court (254) 435-6626

_____ County Court (254) ____ - ____

Justice of the Peace (254) ____ - ____

(Each County will amend this notice to include the appropriate contact information and remove this note from the form.)

“EXHIBIT 2’

HEALTH SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headaches, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea?

2. Have you been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19?

If you answer “YES” to either question, you may not enter the court room. Please contact the appropriate court to reschedule your proceedings.

220th District Court (254) 435-6626

_____ County Court (254) ____ - ____

Justice of the Peace (254) ____ - ____

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