

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Houston City 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 the City of Houston Municipal Courts 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 in-person safely.
3. The presiding judge of the municipal court will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and mayor and 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 2, 2020

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court management staff will conduct meetings relating to the operations of their job by teleconferences when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: face protections will be worn by Judges and court staff upon entry of the city buildings that house the Municipal Courts, and temperatures taken if possible. Access to the courthouses will be monitored, controlled and limited to only certain entrances.
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 be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures:
 - Send notices (media, television, Twitter, Facebook) to all citizens that they will be screened for temperatures by appropriate Health Department officials or designee upon entering the city building.
 - Citizens entering the building will be required to wear a face protection of some kind.
 - Social distancing will be enforced and marked off in the courtrooms, jury assembly rooms, security check points and hallways by signs.
 - Protective sneeze guards will be installed in all courtrooms at the bench for the clerks.

- All security checkpoint agents must wear protective covering and gloves.
- All security baskets will be sanitized after each use.
- Baskets will be present in the courtrooms for citizens to place items of review for the Judge.
- Social distancing markers are in place at the entry of the building while going through security.
- Marking off social distancing will be placed on the benches where the citizens are seated inside and outside the courtrooms.
- Spray painting outside sidewalk where lines will form to enter the building for social distancing.
- Should a citizen be turned away due to temperature or answering yes to the COVID-19 questions, a judge and clerk will be available at a remote location near the temperature checkpoint to reschedule the citizen's case.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
 - Reducing the number and size of all dockets.
 - Reducing the number of jurors summoned.
 - Reducing the number of non-issue settings.
 - Adding additional courts for overflow if/when needed.
 - Adding an additional Saturday dockets if necessary.

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).
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by:
 - Once notice and documentation is given to the court special settings will be given to those who qualify.
 - Depending on the quantity of those who qualify, a different day and docket hour will be given.
 - If the case is set for jury, they will be scheduled later in the day so that most of the people have left the building.

- Depending on the number who sign up, that will determine how many dockets we will initiate for the vulnerable populations

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. 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.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snack rooms, may be 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 court staff.
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 or hand sanitizers 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, building security personnel, court bailiff's or Houston Police Officers 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.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, health department staff or trained bailiff's will 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 building.

3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court in the Joint Processing Center 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 100.4°F will not be transported to the courtroom.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves, N95 masks, and hand sanitizers.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building 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 cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.

Cleaning

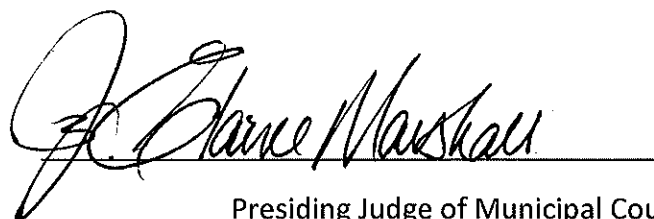
1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every two hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom 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.

Other

- These rules apply to all Municipal Courts for the City of Houston, the Lubbock Court location, Mykawa Court location, Westside Court location, North Command Court location, Clear Lake Court location, and the Kingwood Court location.

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 mayor, 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: 5/8/2020



J. Clarence Marshall

Presiding Judge of Municipal Court

SPECIAL NOTICE

Attention Citizens:

DUE TO COVID-19, MANY OF YOU ARE PART OF THE VULNERABLE POPULATION. IF YOU ARE OLDER THAN 65 YEARS OF AGE, SUFFERING WITH UNDERLYING HEALTH CONDITIONS, SUCH AS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, CHRONIC LUNG DISEASE, DIABETES, OBESITY, ASTHMA, OR WHOSE IMMUNE SYSTEM IS COMPROMISED DUE TO CHEMOTHERAPY FOR CANCER OR ANY OTHER CONDITION REQUIRING SUCH THERAPY.

IF YOU ARE PART OF THIS GROUP PLEASE CONTACT THE COURT AT 713.247.8924 AND SPEAK TO SOMEONE REGARDING A SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION AND A SPECIALIZED DOCKET TO ENSURE YOUR CONTINUED SAFETY.