

# **COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Shoreacres Municipal Court, Harris 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 the Shoreacres Municipal Court 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 communicate with the local health authority as needed.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than July 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: Temperatures will be taken of all individuals upon entering any buildings housing the court.
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 all court staff have been notified in writing they will be required to wear face coverings, and will practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: Staff are provided with hand sanitizer, sanitizing spray for workstations, gloves, and masks. Hand Sanitizer is provided in the lobby for the public. The public/defendants are only allowed into city hall one at a time. Options available to handle cases by phone, email, mail, and a 24 hour drop box are being encouraged to reduce any in-person dealings with court cases. Notices for these options have been posted on the court's website, mailed, and are posted outside of all court buildings. Before any signature is required, the defendant/public will be required to use hand sanitizer. Any pen used by the public will be sprayed with disinfectant between use and then disposed of at end of day.

## **Scheduling**

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:  
After screening, defendants will sign into court with their name and phone number outside the court building. After signing in, the defendant will wait in his/her vehicle. Defendants will be called/text to enter the court room as allowed by social distancing practices. Upon entering the courtroom defendants will be required to use hand sanitizer. Once seen by Judge/Prosecutor, defendants will go back to their vehicle and wait to be called into city hall for payment/paperwork processing. Defendants will be let into city hall one at a time.

## **Vulnerable Populations**

1. Individuals who are 65 and older 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 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 being heard in a virtual hearing, by individual appointment, or by being eligible for a reset.

## **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. 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. Entrants to the court building will be instructed on the location of the public restroom and encouraged to wash their hands before and after entry to the court room.

## ***Gallery***

3. 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.
4. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to the second row and only as designated in 1. of Social Distancing above.

## *Well*

5. In each 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 entrances to the building, and outside of bathroom.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judge's bench, and in the hallways. Waste receptacles for the tissues have been placed in proximity to the tissues to ensure ready disposal.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in the court building.
4. Entrants into the court building for court proceedings will be instructed on the location of the public restroom and encouraged to wash their hands before and after entry to the court room. Signs depicting proper hand washing techniques have been posted in each public restroom.

## **Screening**

1. When individuals and staff enter the court building, Bailiff or officers or designated staff will screen individuals entering the building using the State/CDC Checklist for COVID-19 symptoms. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building. They will receive a flyer with information on how to obtain a diagnostic test in the Greater Houston Area and given a court reset date.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, Bailiff and or officers will be required to use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.4°F as per CDC guidelines will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including face mask, gloves and hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes.
4. Information and training have been provided to all screening staff by using the State/CDC guidelines.
5. Signs will be placed on all entrance doors informing visitors to stay home if they are sick.

## **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the court building will be strongly encouraged 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 if available.

3. Individuals who refuse to comply with recommendations to wear face coverings will be required to isolate themselves in their motor vehicle until called by court personnel and to comply with all social distancing and hand washing instructions or, if appropriate, to appear remotely (such as by teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other means).
4. 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.
5. All staff and the public will be notified by letter, phone call or e-mail

### Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean and disinfect the common areas frequently touched surfaces, doorknobs, light switches, ect. in the court building.
2. Court building cleaning and disinfecting staff will clean and disinfect the courtrooms between every docket, proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom has been used.
3. Court building cleaning and disinfecting staff have been provided with EPA -registered disinfectants know to be effective with the coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning and disinfecting staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and have been provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

### Other


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: 6/1/2020



  
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J. L. Jay  
Presiding Judge of Municipal Court

  
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David Jennings  
Mayor, City of Shoreacres