

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Tarrant 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 Tarrant 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 the 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 local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and will adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
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. Judges and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: The judge and court staff will monitor themselves prior to coming to work; and, as thermometers become available, temperatures will be checked before beginning work each day.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°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 while in the courtrooms during in-person proceedings and as set forth below. Judges and court staff will practice social distancing and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.

5. Protective Measures:

Plexiglass panels will be installed between the judge's bench and the witness stand, between the court reporter's desk and the witness stand as well as between the court reporter's desk and the area where an attorney or litigant might approach a witness. Judges may request additional plexiglass panels for other areas of the courtroom.

Judges will establish policies as to procedures within the courtroom to minimize the necessity of any participant in the court proceedings to violate any social distancing rules.

Scheduling

- 1. The attached court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the respective court buildings.**
 - A.) Courts, in court buildings where there are multiple courts, have agreed to divide their dockets and will follow the schedules attached hereto for the court building where that court is located. When in-person trials are set that are expected to exceed one day or where multiple witnesses are expected who may congregate in conference rooms or in public areas of the court building, court coordinators will communicate with the other court coordinators on the same floor. The communication is to be done as soon as possible to ensure that other courts on the same floor do not have similar trials set on their dockets so as to allow social distancing in the public areas and to be in compliance with the occupancy load for that floor as determined by the Tarrant County Facilities Management Department (Facilities).**
 - B.) Except in instances where multi-person dockets are necessary, judges and court staff will set trials and hearings individually and will stagger them throughout the day rather than all at one setting. When multi-person dockets are necessary, judges and court staff will ensure that proper social distancing is maintained not only within the courtroom but also in the public areas outside the courtroom if all persons are not able to be in the courtroom at the same time.**
 - C.) Specialty courts will meet at such times as necessary so long as they are complying with other scheduling rules within that court building as well as these guidelines.**

D.) Attached hereto and incorporated herein are court schedules for courts in the Tim Curry Justice Center, the Vandergriff Civil Courts Building, the Family Law Center, and the 1895 Courthouse.

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. Judges and staff will include information on orders setting hearings, dockets notices, and on 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 virtual settings through Zoom or by telephone conferences when appropriate.

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. Facilities has determined the number of persons who will be permitted to be in an elevator. That capacity will not be exceeded.
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. Tables and chairs have been arranged for proper social distancing in public areas including breakrooms and snack rooms. Vending machines will be sanitized frequently during each day by the court building cleaning staff

Gallery

5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined by Facilities and posted at each courtroom. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
6. The chairs/pews in the gallery of the courtroom have been marked to identify appropriate social distancing. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

7. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench as well as the 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 in so far as possible. Plexiglass will be installed in all areas where there may be less than 6 feet of social distancing.

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" has been posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

Screening

1. Signage has been posted at the entrances of court buildings and in the halls immediately outside of each court located in a multi-use building. The signs will have language asking individuals entering the court buildings 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. Signage will be posted to include telephone numbers for courts, court coordinators, or administrators in each building so that persons who may have symptoms may notify the courts of their inability to appear.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperatures 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.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the courtrooms will be provided personal protective equipment, including face coverings, gloves, and other appropriate equipment as may be determined by Facilities.

Face Coverings

1. Judges and court staff are not required, but are strongly encouraged, to wear face coverings in the secured non-public areas designated for each court unless they are alone in their offices.
2. Judges and court staff are required to wear face coverings while in the courtrooms during in-person proceedings. Judges may remove face coverings when, in the opinion of the judge, it is necessary when speaking for clarity.
3. All other individuals entering the courtrooms will be required to wear surgical face coverings and shall not remove those coverings except upon order of the judge.
4. Individuals will be strongly encouraged to bring a surgical face covering with them, but if the individual does not have a surgical face covering, a disposable surgical face covering will be provided by the Sheriff's Department. Individuals will be strongly encouraged to wear the surgical face covering at all times while in the court building.

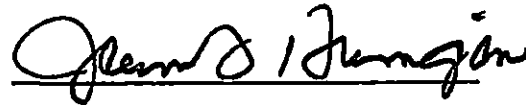
Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the public areas of the court building so that public spaces are cleaned at least every two to three hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every in-person proceeding, 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.
5. In-person proceedings shall be set at least 15 minutes apart to allow court building cleaning staff to clean the courtrooms between proceedings.
6. Court staff will provide dockets or other information as may be requested by Facilities so that they may know when to send the court building cleaning staff to clean the courtroom between in-person proceedings.
7. Court staff will clean the witness stand including the microphone and the chair used after each witness testifies

The following judges presented proposed operating plans, and those plans were considered in the formulation of this operating plan: Judges in the Tim Curry Justice Center, judges in the Vandergriff Civil Courts Building, Judge Alex Kim, Judge Mike Hrabal, Local Administrative Justice of the Peace Bill Brandt, Judge Sergio DeLeon, and Judge Ralph Swearingen.

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 buildings covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 6/2/2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glenn S. Swearingen", written over a horizontal line.

Local Administrative District Judge