

# COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Hockley County and Cochran 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 **Hockley and Cochran Counties** will implement the following protective measures:

## General

1. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
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.

## 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: when available
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 may not be permitted to enter the courtroom and should seek medical advice.
4. Judges and court staff may be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time, when interacting with the public.
5. Protective Measures: follow local health authority.
6. Courts should take precautions to ensure judges and courts staff do not enter the courthouse when there is a likelihood that they may have COVID-19, and courts should take reasonable steps to protect judges and court staff from contracting COVID-19.
7. Courts should consider encourage teleworking for judges and court staff whenever possible and feasible

## Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Spread the scheduling of hearing based upon the predicted length of the hearing as represented by the participants.
2. In-person proceedings must be scheduled to reduce the number of people entering or in the courthouse at any one period of time. Judges in counties and cities with multiple judges in a building must coordinate scheduling of any in- person proceedings to reduce the number of people in the courthouse at one time.

Judges should attempt to alert parties who will not be proceeding prior to the day of trial to reduce attendance at the court facility.

### 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 remote hearings where possible.
4. **Vulnerable individuals are those 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.**

### 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.
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 will be posted on each restroom door.
4. **Courts should consider how to ensure distancing in public common areas, galleries of courtrooms,<sup>15</sup> wells of the courtroom, hallways, elevators, restrooms, or other locations where the public might gather.**
5. **Special attention should be given to scheduling in buildings with multiple courtrooms, as common areas such as waiting areas, halls and elevators may become crowded in such a way that it is impossible to maintain appropriate social distancing.**

### *Gallery*

6. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom will be determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
7. The gallery of the courtroom will be marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating may be limited to every other row.
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## *Well*

9. 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.

## **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.
4. **Courts should consider having hand sanitizer dispensers available at various locations around the courthouse, including at the entry and exits from the building and courtrooms. Courts should ensure that tissues are available for public use in courtrooms and other public areas. Courts should post readily visible signage reminding individuals of best hygiene protocols.**

## **Screening**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, someone with advice of local health authority 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, someone with advice of local health authority and when thermometer is available 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 building.
3. 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. Hearings will be remote when possible.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including masks, when PPE is available.
5. **Individuals feeling feverish or with measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0°F, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea.**
6. **Special attention should be given to how inmates or detainees from jail and juvenile facilities who may be transported to a courtroom will be screened, including consideration of a lower threshold temperature of 99.6°F as an indicator of symptoms.**
7. **Screeners should be provided appropriate face protection and gloves.**

## **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the court building may be required to wear face coverings at all times.

2. Individuals may 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 should be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.
4. **Cloth face coverings, at a minimum, should be required of individuals while in the courthouse. Should an individual be in the courthouse for lengthy periods of time, non-medical grade face masks should be considered if they are 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 24 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.
4. **Sanitizing should be routinely and more regularly performed, including when a transition of participants occurs within a courtroom between hearings and after recesses.**

### Other

Germinator will clean the courtroom every 90 days.

Court may take place in an event center, activity center, auditorium, banquet hall or gymnasium to accomplish the goals of the operating plan.

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: April 1, 2021



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Local Administrative District Judge  
Pat Phelan  
286<sup>th</sup> District Judge