

COVID-19 OPERATING PLAN FOR JUDICIARY OF KNOX COUNTY

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 Knox 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 as deemed appropriate by the presiding judge of each court.
2. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely or within the prescribed social distancing recommendations of the local health authority.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and the county judge and 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 at the direction of the presiding judge of the court.

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: Each Staff member will be required to report any sign of 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, or diarrhea. Upon entering the courtroom the Judge and all court staff will have their temperature taken and will only be allowed to proceed if the temperature reading is less than 99.6°F.
3. Any Courthouse employee who has had a positive test for Covid-19 must report that result to the county judge and self quarantine until cleared by to return to work by a physician.
4. Judges or court staff who have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°F, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the courtroom and should seek medical advice.
5. Judges and court staff will be required to practice social distancing and permitted to wear face coverings and encouraged to practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.

6. Protective Measures: Face masks and gloves will be provided to the Judge and all court staff.

Scheduling

Judges in Knox County shall coordinate scheduling of court proceedings in order to ensure that no more than one court is in session in the court building at any given time. Each court shall limit the number of matters to be heard during each session in order to ensure that social distancing can be maintained in the court building.

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, docket 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 courtroom door.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by allowing for hearings to be rescheduled if needed, specially set hearings to allow for minimum contact with others and allow remote hearings/hybrid hearings as available.

Social Distancing

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the courthouse will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least six (6) feet.
2. Only (1) person will be allowed in a restroom. A notice will be posted on each restroom door.

Gallery

3. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of the courtroom is thirty (30) and shall be posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
4. The gallery of the courtroom shall be marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.
5. Counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating shall be arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least six (6) feet between each space.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers will be made available for public use at each entrance to the courthouse and in or near the courtroom.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, and on the judge's bench.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted on the courtroom door.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, courthouse security staff will ask the individuals if they are feeling feverish; feeling ill; 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, courthouse security staff will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equal or exceed 99.6°F will be refused admittance to the courtroom.
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.
4. Courthouse security staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves and face masks.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building prior to or when hearings are in session will be offered disposable face coverings.
2. At the direction of the presiding judge, face coverings shall be worn while in the courtroom or in common areas. Provided that social distancing can be maintained in the well of the courtroom, the presiding judge may permit hearing participants to remove their face coverings.


Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every day.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms 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.

I have conferred with the Knox County Judge regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the Texas Department of State Health Services Regional Medical Director Joel Massey M.D., M.P.H. who is acting as the local health authority during a period when no local health authority has been appointed for Knox County. I have attached documentation of our consultation to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan understand that they are obligated to conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 6/2/2020



Jennifer A. Habert, 50TH District Judge
Local Administrative District Judge