

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Lamar 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 **Lamar 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.
2. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The local administrative district judge or his designee will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
4. Judges will begin hearing non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020.
5. This plan does not provide for the use of jury trials. Jury trial proceedings are prohibited until further guidance from the Office of Court Administration is provided. At such time, the local administrative district judge will formulate a separate plan for the use of trials by jury, utilizing the same process as in the formulation of this non-jury plan.

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 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.
3. It is recommended that Judges and court staff wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
4. Protective Measures:
 - A. Courtrooms are to be rearranged so that the policies stated herein are met;
 - B. Judges will confirm with staff and litigants before each hearing that no person in attendance has symptoms of COVID-19 or is under orders to quarantine;
 - C. If any person has a reasonable objection to being present in the Courtroom, the Court will use its best efforts to accommodate the person using other means which would allow their participation in the hearing;

- D. Witnesses will be advised before the hearing to comply with the policies stated herein;
and
- E. All persons who testify may testify with their mask on.

Scheduling

1. Each Court is responsible for the scheduling of their own matters in conformity with the Emergency Orders referenced above.
2. Weekly Dockets that will take place in Lamar County should be emailed to the Court Coordinator for the 6th Judicial District. The Court Coordinator will then have the responsibility to issue notice to the Courts in the event the Dockets would result in situations that might exceed what is allowed by the Emergency Orders.
3. Any in-person hearing should be scheduled to allow the litigants and counsel to enter and exit the building safely.

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 electronic means such as telephonic appearances or video conferencing.

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 snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

Gallery

1. 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 Judges and, at their direction, court staff.
2. The gallery of each courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

1. 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.
2. When possible, parties will be allowed to be questioned from counsel table where they sit.

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. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, Courthouse Security 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. 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.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including masks and gloves.

Face Coverings

1. Wearing of masks will be encouraged and allowed for any individual entering the court building.

Cleaning

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

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 the 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: 5/27/2020

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a central vertical stroke, positioned above a horizontal line.

Local Administrative District Judge