

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Somervell County Judiciary Somervell County Courthouse Annex and Justice of the Peace Offices¹

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, Judges and other individuals entering the County/District Courthouse and Foyer thereof and Commissioners Courtroom on days when cases are set for hearing, the following protective measures are implemented:

GENERAL

1. All Judges shall 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 shall use 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 adjust this operating plan as necessary.
4. The COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease Epi Curve Report published by the Texas Health and Human Services Epidemiology Program for Public Health Region 2/3, Somervell County, will be closely monitored as updates are issued. The County Judge, Administrative Judge, and County Health Official will scrutinize any fluctuation in the numbers on the report as to levels of COVID-19 in Somervell County and consider adjustments to the Operating Plan to protect the health and safety of all parties impacted under the Plan as well as all residents of Somervell County as more information becomes available.

JUDGE AND COURT STAFF HEALTH

1. Judges and court staff may work remotely and telework as directed by the Judge of their Court.
2. On days cases are set for hearing, Judges, court staff and all employees shall have daily temperature checks upon entering the County/District Courthouse and Foyer thereof and Commissioners Courtroom. Staff and employees with any symptom of COVID-19, or who learn they have had close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19, will NOT ENTER the County/District Courthouse and Foyer thereof and Commissioners Courtroom, and will alert the Judge of their Court or supervisor who will then immediately alert the Local Administrative Judge and County Judge.
3. Judges and court staff shall practice social distancing, practice the recommended hygiene safety measures for COVID-19, and have face coverings available at their desk or in their office.

SCHEDULING

1. All Civil and Domestic hearings shall continue to be held via ZOOM or Telephonic hearing at this time to the extent practical. TRO's and Protective Orders may be heard via ZOOM; however, individuals ordered to

¹ This Operating Plan addresses the Somervell County Courthouse Annex specifically, for ease of reference. The two (2) Somervell County Justice of the Peace Offices are located in the Somervell County Courthouse Annex and shall adopt and/or adapt these procedures as reasonably feasible for their location. The Justices of the Peace primarily use the Commissioners Courtroom for hearing cases, but also use the County/District Courtroom as needed.

appear, who have not retained counsel, may be allowed to appear in person if the Judge finds that it is not feasible for them to participate remotely.

2. Judges may allow attorneys and individuals to appear in person, as necessary for specific proceedings. Courtroom attendance shall be kept to the minimum number the Judge needs to hear a case. Contested hearings that require in person attendance of more than 20 people shall not be held without first coordinating with other Courts/Offices to minimize the total building occupancy load.
3. Courts will coordinate any in-person Criminal hearings so that multiple courts will not have large criminal dockets on the same day or at the same time. A "Zoom room" has been set up at the Somervell County Jail: remote hearings will continue to be conducted as directed by the Judge of each Court, to further reduce transport of inmates and keep the number of individuals in the Somervell County Law Enforcement Center to a minimum.
4. Jury Trials are currently prohibited by the Office of Court Administration. Procedures and guidelines for Jury trials will be addressed after additional recommendations are received from the OCA (Office of Court Administration) and a Somervell County Plan can be put in place.

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

1. A list of health conditions that indicate an individual may be at an enhanced risk within the vulnerable COVID-19 population will be prepared and posted on the Somervell County Courts website, on the bulletin boards, and inside each Courtroom. A copy of the list of conditions will be attached to hearing notices, with a phone number to call if accommodations (including remote access via telephone or video conference) are needed.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

1. On days court cases are scheduled for hearing All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the County/District Courthouse and Foyer thereof and Commissioners Courtroom shall maintain social distancing of at least six feet.
2. There are no elevators in the Somervell County Courthouse Annex.
3. Public restrooms and employee restrooms in the Somervell County Courthouse Annex allow for social distancing by design. A Social Distancing reminder sign and hygiene safety measures will be posted outside and inside all public restrooms.

GALLERY & WELL

1. There is one (1) County/District Courtroom in the Somervell County Courthouse Annex that is used by all courts 8 to 10 days a month. The County/District Courtroom is designed to hold 102 people in the gallery and 25 in front of the bar. While this plan is in effect the maximum occupancy of the courtroom will be limited to 24 in the gallery and 10 in front of the bar for non jury hearings. Appropriate signs will be posted at each courtroom door.
2. Each judge shall monitor the courtroom to enforce appropriate social distancing, whether by skipping rows and/or limiting the number of individuals by row. Family members of the same household may be seated together as practical to further maximize social distancing in the gallery.

3. Social Distancing in the Courtroom applies to counsel table, witness stand, Judge's bench, clerk, court reporter and bailiff seating and has been arranged to meet COVID-19 social distancing recommendations for safety. There will be no hearings at the bench. Attorneys and or pro se parties shall present their case from the Plaintiff and Defense tables. The witness stand adjacent to the Judge's bench shall not be utilized or occupied. Witnesses called to testify shall be seated in the jury box, center seat, back row to allow adequate social distancing from the Judge and the Court Reporter.
4. On days cases are set for hearing in the Commissioners Courtroom, there will be a maximum of ten (10) persons in the Commissioners Courtroom.
5. Jury Trial procedures and guidelines will be addressed after additional recommendations are received from the OCA (Office of Court Administration) and a Somervell County Plan can be put in place.

HYGIENE

1. Hand sanitizer will be kept on hand to the full extent available in the supply chain. Hand sanitizer, tissues, and lined trash receptacles will be placed at the main public entrance to the Somervell County Courthouse Annex, inside public restrooms, in each courtroom along the gallery rows, and at various locations throughout the Somervell County Courthouse Annex as available in the supply chain.
2. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations in the Somervell County Courthouse Annex.

SCREENING

Public Entrance

1. On days court cases are set, all individuals entering the County/District Courthouse and Foyer thereof and Commissioners Courtroom will be met by security and required to review a written checklist (both English and Spanish) of symptoms common to COVID-19 as provided by the Somervell County health officer.
2. Individuals will be asked, but not required, to write their name and driver's license number or ID number and check any symptoms they are currently experiencing including fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, rash, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and sore throat, and indicate whether they have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals will also be asked to indicate whether they have an underlying health condition that may indicate they fall within the COVID 19 vulnerable population.
3. All individuals will have their temperature taken with a non-contact infrared thermometer and the temperature reading will be written on the questionnaire.
4. Individuals (1) indicating "yes" as to a current symptom or condition, or (2) with a temperature higher than 99.6 will be directed to return to their car and call 254-897-2322 for further questioning and information gathering. This information will be relayed to the presiding Judge of the Court to which they seek access. Should the individual be seeking services from the District Clerk, County Clerk, District Attorney or County Attorney, the elected official of that office will be notified.
5. Individuals known to be COVID-19 symptomatic and those with temperature readings over 99.6 will not be allowed in the County/District Courthouse and Foyer thereof and Commissioners Courtroom.

However, arrangements or accommodations will be made to proceed in a manner that will protect the individual and minimize any possible transmission of COVID-19.

6. Personal Protective Equipment including masks and gloves will be provided for staff screeners at the Somervell County Courthouse Annex.
7. Clipboards used for questionnaires will be disinfected after each use with spray disinfectant as available in the supply chain.
8. Questionnaires will be kept for 30 days, in case they are needed for tracking purposes. A copy of the questionnaire is attached for reference.

Inmates

9. Inmates being transported from the jail to the Somervell County Courthouse Annex shall be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken prior to transport. Any inmate with a temperature higher than 99.6, or known to be COVID-19 symptomatic, will not be transported and the appropriate court will be notified by phone.

FACE COVERINGS

1. On days cases are set, all individuals entering the County/District Courthouse and Foyer thereof and Commissioners Courtroom shall be asked and encouraged to wear face coverings and will be encouraged to bring their face coverings with them. Somervell County will supply disposable facemasks to the public as the supply chain allows. Judges will set any additional facemask requirements within their Courtrooms.

CLEANING

1. On days cases are set for hearing, the County/District Courtroom and foyer thereof and the Commissions Courtroom will be continuously cleaned. Common areas will be cleaned at least once every eight (8) hours. Court and staff offices will be cleaned at least once every twenty-four (24) hours. Additional cleaning of frequently touched surfaces will occur throughout the business day. Each judge will make additional cleaning requests as needed depending on the number of individuals in their courtroom.
2. Somervell County will provide cleaning supplies, as available in the supply chain. Should additional cleaning staff be required, Judges will make the request to the Administrative Judge and County Judge, who will notify Public Works of the requested additions. Somervell County shall make appropriate personal protective equipment available to cleaning staff.

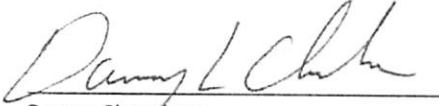
This plan was prepared with guidance from the Office of Court Administration and is generally consistent with Executive Order GA-23, which was based upon the recommendations of Texas Department of State Health Services Commissioner Dr. John Hellerstedt as well as advice from Dr. Anthony Fauci and Dr. Deborah Birx. As contained in GA-23, this plan recommends that all persons should follow the health protocols recommended by DSHS, including recommendations to reduce occupancy of buildings, practice social distancing, practice safe hygiene, and wear face coverings when possible. This plan has been created with input from Judge Sydney Hewlett, 18th District Court. This plan has been approved by County Judge Danny Chambers and Dr. Steven Vacek, M.D., Chief Health Official for Somervell County.

Approved:



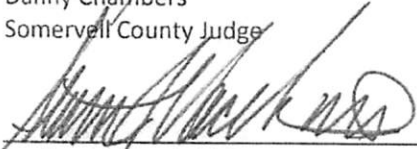
Wayne Bridewell
Somervell County Local Administrative Judge
Judge 249th Judicial District Court

this 29th day of May, 2020.



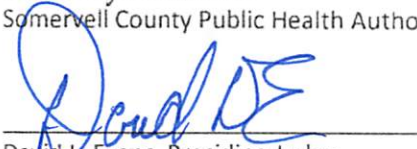
Danny Chambers
Somervell County Judge

this 28th day of May, 2020.



Dr. Steven Vacek, M.D.
Somervell County Public Health Authority

this 29th day of May, 2020.



David L. Evans, Presiding Judge
Eighth Administrative Judicial Region of Texas

this 1 day of June, 2020.

**COVID-19 Operating Plan, Somervell County Judiciary
Checklist of Symptoms and Conditions**

Name _____ Temperature _____

Identifying info (driver's license, ID Card number) Phone Number

Please place an "X" beside any symptom experienced in the last 14 days:

_____ Fever

_____ Cough

_____ Shortness of breath

_____ Difficulty breathing

_____ Rash

_____ Nausea

_____ Vomiting

_____ Diarrhea

_____ Sore throat

_____ Have you been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19?

Please place an "X" beside any underlying health conditions:

_____ High Blood Pressure

_____ COPD

_____ Diabetes

_____ Obesity

_____ Asthma

_____ Compromised Immune System

See reverse for Spanish/ver reverso para espanol

**COVID-19 Operating Plan, Somervell County Judiciary
Lista de verificación de síntomas y condiciones**

Nombre _____ Temperatura _____

Informacion identificativa (licencia de conducir or ID) numero de telefono

Coloque una "X" junto a cualquier sintoma experimentado en los ultimos 14 dias:

___ Fiebre

___ tos

___ dificultad para respirar

___ respiracion dificultosa

___ erupcion

___ Nausea

___ Vomitos

___ Diarrea

___ dolor de garganta

___ ha estado en contacto cercano con una persona que se le confiesa tener COVID-19?

Coloque una "X" junto a cualquier condiciones de salud subyacentes:

___ Hipertension

___ EPOC

___ Diabetes

___ Obesidad

___ Asma

___ Sistema inmunitario comprometido