

# **COVID-19 Operating Plan for Resumption of Jury Trials Collin County Court System**

*Effective Date: July 1, 2020*

This plan incorporates by reference all the terms, practices and protective measures in the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Courthouse Facilities Controlled by Collin County.

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of jurors, litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, Collin County will provide and recommend the following additional protective measures for the resumption of jury trials:

## **General**

1. The courts who share courthouse facilities have approved a rotating schedule for in-person proceedings, including jury trials.
2. County Courts at Law will directly summons 22 jurors to appear at the specified courtroom for the trial. This number is within the capacity for social distancing in the courtroom. The hallway will be marked for social distancing of the jurors until they are allowed into the courtroom.
3. District Courts will summons no more than 100 jurors to the Central Jury Room for voir dire for 1 case per day. The capacity of the Central Jury Room for Collin County is 600 persons. After the jury is selected in the Central Jury Room, the trial itself will take place in the courtroom with the practices outlined herein.

## **Juror and Court Staff Health**

4. Each prospective juror will have their temperature taken via a hand-held thermometer as they enter the courthouse, to ensure that no one with fever or an elevated temperature is admitted.
5. Once they enter the building and pass through the initial security screening, jurors will be directed to the central jury room and seated to achieve the maximum distancing possible.
6. Masks will be distributed, or jurors may wear their own when they enter the courthouse. Until the final jury is actually selected, seated and sworn, everyone appearing as a prospective juror will be required to wear a mask.
7. Latex gloves will be available for those who wish to wear them, but gloves are not required. If a juror would like gloves, they may ask the staff for them when they are seated in the Central Jury Room.
8. Microphones will be assigned to individual jurors for their sole use for at least the minimum number needed to cover the panel and strikes. To the extent there are more venire members than microphones, those least likely to be selected will share several microphones that will be sanitized between users.
9. The number of personal items juror may bring will be restricted to no more than they can hold in their lap at all times. Jurors will not be permitted to place personal items on surrounding chairs.

10. Hand sanitizer (alcohol based) will be available to jurors at multiple locations inside the courthouse and Central Jury Room, and jurors may ask Court Security Officers to make it available at their seat once they are selected to the final jury and seated in the courtroom.
11. The courtroom, jury room, and jury room bathrooms will be cleaned each evening when the court recesses, and this will continue throughout the trial.
12. Individual lunches will be provided to the selected jurors during each day of the trial to minimize any travel in and out of the Courthouse, and to minimize juror's interaction at local restaurants. Jurors are also free to bring their lunch.

### **Vulnerable Populations**

13. 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.
14. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for jury service may contact the jury services clerks and reschedule their jury service for a future time to be determined by the juror.

### **Social Distancing**

15. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the courtroom will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.

#### *Gallery*

16. 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 court staff.
17. Those selected to serve as jurors for the trial will be seated during the trial in the gallery of the courtroom, not the jury box, to achieve the maximum distancing possible. The gallery of the courtroom ordinarily seats 65.
18. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating will be staggered to promote social distancing.
19. The counsel tables for the courtroom have been moved to accommodate social distancing and the jurors being seated in the gallery instead of the jury box.
20. For District Court trials, the jury will deliberate in the courtroom, or an alternate courtroom. The existing jury deliberation room will not be used due to its size.

#### *Well*

21. 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, where possible.
22. Plexiglas barriers will be installed in appropriate places in the courtroom.

## **Screening**

23. Jurors will be notified they may contact the jury clerks to reschedule their service if they:
- a) have been diagnosed by a licensed physician as having coronavirus anytime within the past 30 days;
  - b) are actively caring for a family member or loved one who has tested positive for the Coronavirus; or
  - c) are now in self-quarantine status and that status will continue during the date on their jury summons.

## **Other**

A copy of the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Courthouse Facilities Controlled by Collin County, the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Resumption of Jury Trials, and the attached juror letter addressing their upcoming jury service in the era of Coronavirus will all be posted on the Jury Services website for Collin County, as well as the websites for each County and District Court.

County Court at Law No. 1, Hon. Corinne Mason  
County Court at Law No. 2, Hon. Barnett Walker  
County Court at Law No. 3, Hon. Lance S. Baxter  
County Court at Law No. 4, Hon. David Rippel  
County Court at Law No. 5, Hon. Dan Wilson  
County Court at Law No. 6, Hon. Jay A Bender  
County Court at Law No. 7, Hon. David Waddill  
County Probate Court No. 1, Hon. Weldon Copeland  
199th Judicial District, Hon. Angela Tucker



219th Judicial District, Hon. Jennifer Edgeworth  
296th Judicial District, Hon. John Roach, Jr.  
366th Judicial District, Hon. Ray Wheless  
380th Judicial District, Hon. Benjamin Smith  
401st Judicial District, Hon. Mark Rusch  
416th Judicial District, Hon. Andrea Thompson  
417th Judicial District, Hon. Cynthia Wheless  
429th Judicial District, Hon. Jill Willis  
469th Judicial District, Hon. Piper McCraw  
470th Judicial District, Hon. Emily A. Miskel

## RE: Your Upcoming Jury Service in the Era of Coronavirus

Dear Prospective Jurors:

This letter is in addition to the Summons directing you to appear for Jury Service at the Russell A. Steindam Courthouse at 2100 Bloomdale Rd., McKinney, Texas 75071. These will be some of the first jury trials we have undertaken since the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic. We want to assure you that every reasonable precaution will be taken to enhance the health and safety of the jury, the parties, the lawyers and the Court staff during jury selection and the jury trial to follow.

So that you won't be surprised when you arrive, please be aware of the following:

1. Each prospective juror will have their temperature taken via a hand-held thermometer as they enter the courthouse, to ensure that no one with fever or an elevated temperature is admitted;
2. Once you enter the building and pass through the initial security screening, you will be directed to the central jury room and seated to achieve the maximum distancing possible;
3. Masks will be distributed, or you may wear your own when you enter the courthouse. Until the final jury is actually selected, seated and sworn, everyone appearing as a prospective juror will be required to wear a mask;
4. Latex gloves will be available for those who wish to wear them, but gloves are not required. If you would like gloves, ask the staff for them when you are seated in the Central Jury Room;
5. Please do not bring more personal items than you can hold in your lap at all times. You will not be permitted to place personal items on surrounding chairs;
6. Hand sanitizer (alcohol based) will be available to you at multiple locations inside the courthouse and Central Jury Room, and you may ask Court Security Officers to make it available at your seat, once you are selected to the final jury and seated in the courtroom;
7. Those selected for this jury should know that the six (6) to fourteen (14) jurors will be seated during the trial in the gallery of the courtroom, not the jury box, to achieve the maximum distancing possible. The gallery of the courtroom ordinarily seats 65;

8. The courtroom, jury room and jury room bathrooms will be cleaned each evening when the court recesses, and this will continue throughout the trial;
9. Individual lunches will be provided to the selected jurors during each day of the trial to minimize any travel in and out of the Courthouse and to minimize juror's interaction at local restaurants. You are also free to bring your lunch.

If you:

- a. have been diagnosed by a licensed physician as having Coronavirus anytime within the past 30 days;
- b. are actively caring for a family member or loved one who has tested positive for the Coronavirus, or
- c. are now in self-quarantine status and that status will continue during the date on your jury summons

Then,

in any of these situations: please immediately advise the jury clerks at 972-548-4315. They may ask you to furnish documentation regarding such from your physician, for the court.

The longest we anticipate you being required to serve is 5 days, but it is our expectation that the average length of service will be 1-3 days. That being the case, if you have a scheduled surgical procedure for yourself or a dependent that can't be rescheduled, or if you have some other pre-existing obligation that would make it extremely difficult and create a real hardship for you to be here as requested, then you should immediately advise the jury clerks at 972-548-4315 as soon as possible.

Please be aware that the right to trial by jury is one of the cornerstones of our democracy, and jury trials necessarily involve sacrifice from those citizens called upon to serve. This has always been true, but it is especially true during these unique and trying times. It is our personal conviction that jury service is the second highest form of public service that any American can perform (second only to service in the Armed Forces). The right to trial by jury has been enshrined within the Seventh Amendment to our U. S. Constitution since 1791, and it was one of the stated principles in the Declaration of Independence which fueled our struggle to become an independent nation. Only those with extreme hardships should seek to be excused based on pre-existing obligations.

It is vital that you appear and present yourself for jury service as summonsed; however, the Courts want you to know that we are mindful of these challenging times and we will take every reasonable precaution to maintain your health as well as that of the parties, lawyers and Court staff during this upcoming trial.

We hope this letter is helpful and informative, and we look forward to seeing you in our courthouse soon.

Respectfully,

The Collin County District and County Court Judges

# Central Jury Room Seating Chart

							96	97	98	99	100	101	102		
83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95			
70	71	72	73	74	75		76	77	78	79	80	81	82		
57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69			
44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56			
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43			
18	19	20	21	22	23	24		25	26	27	28	29	30		
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17			
1	2	3	4												
COUNSEL				JUDGE								COURT REPORTER		COUNSEL	

ADA Accessible Seats