

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Brownsville Municipal Court

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 **the City of Brownsville Municipal Court** 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 **presiding judge of the municipal court** will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and **mayor** and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than **allowed by guidance from the OCA**.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when practical.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Effective April 28, 2020, **All Judge and Court Staff will have their temperature read prior to entering the building and anyone whose reading is 100°F or higher will not be permitted to enter the building and asked to seek medical advice.**
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than **100.4°F**, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, or having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 and traveled via airplane internationally or domestically will not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice.
4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: **Posters will be displayed throughout the building reminding judges, court staff and all persons entering the building of how to protect oneself and others.**

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: **All workstations have been spaced at 6 feet apart and other areas will be made available to ensure proper spacing. Dockets will be reduced to a maximum of fifteen (15) defendants once in-person hearings resume. See attachment Municipal Court Docket Grid with 10 in attendance.**

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 **providing assistance over the phone, by email, or scheduling to a videoconference with a judge. If the person does not have access to a computer or smartphone, arrangements will be made so they can appear through videoconference.**

Social Distancing

1. All persons who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. **Only the person with court business will be permitted to enter the building unless the person has children with him or her, is a person of a vulnerable population.**
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. Closure may be an option.
4. With members of the public being limited to 15 people in the 1st floor.

Gallery

5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined and posted. **Court has a capacity of 10 persons and are separated by 6 ft. taking every other row into consideration.** The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

7. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, and bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of and 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. These have been ordered and will be posted.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, security guards 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, security guards will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.4°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided **personal protective equipment, including masks, face shields, and gloves.**

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings **while in the courthouse.**
2. Individuals will 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 if supply is available.


Cleaning

1. **Court staff** will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 3 hours.
2. **Maintenance staff** will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. **Court staff** have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. **Court staff** have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and City Manager 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: 5/28/2020



Presiding Judge of Municipal Court



May 28, 2020

Mr. Mike Sanchez
Assistant Director Municipal Court
1034 E. Levee
Brownsville, Texas 78521

RE: Re-Opening Plan

Dear Mr. Sanchez:

As the Health Authority for the City of Brownsville Public Health Department, I have reviewed the Covid-19 Opening Plan for the City of Brownsville Municipal Court and based on CDC policies, procedures, and guidelines I find no issues or disparities with the presented guidelines.

Should you have any questions or further requirements, please feel free contact me at (956) 542-3437 ext. 6514.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Wells, M.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John A. Wells, M.D.
City Health Authority

The logo for the City of Brownsville, featuring a stylized building with a dome and columns, flanked by palm trees, with the text "CITY OF BROWNSVILLE" below it.

City of Brownsville
1034 E. Levee 2nd Floor, Brownsville, Texas 78520
Phone: 956.542.3437 Fax: 956.546-4355
health.cob.us