

# COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Humble City Judiciary (Modified January 11, 2021)

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 **Humble Municipal Court** will implement the following protective measures:

## Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:  
At 25% capacity only.
2. Subject to orders from the County Judge or City of Humble officials, Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings, except jury trials, no sooner than February 8, 2021. All jury trials are suspended pending further orders of the Supreme Court of Texas. **Any other in-person hearing will be conducted only if the judge has determined that the in-person hearing is necessary and when all reasonable efforts do not permit the proceeding to be conducted remotely.**

## Vulnerable Populations

1. Individuals who are age 65 or older 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. Individuals who also have traveled within a 100 miles of Humble.
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. The notice will advise defendants that their case will be handled virtually utilizing the ZOOM app.
3. Individuals who are scheduled for court need to contact the court and will be accommodated by information concerning their options by mail, email, and or zoom. The court's website will continue to advise individuals of ways to dispose of their cases online, including payment of fines and fees online.

## 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. Social distancing markers will be placed in areas that may cause lines.

2. 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.
3. All persons entering the courthouse will be required to wear face coverings. Persons who appear without face coverings will be provided face coverings before entering the courthouse.
4. 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.
5. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.
6. 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.
7. A plex-glass barrier has been erected in front of the clerk's desk in the court room to separate the clerk from individuals signing documents or requesting forms.
8. Bullet proof glass barriers are in place to separate the public from the clerks at the payment windows in the clerk's office.
9. **As always, individuals are advised in the ticket information they receive at the time of their citation that most defendants may pay their tickets on line without appearing at the courthouse and that they may take advantage of driver safety programs online to avoid a conviction.**

### Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers containing at least 60% alcohol will be placed at the entrances to the building, outside of the courtroom and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues and waste bins have been placed near the doors of the courtroom, at counsel tables, and on the judges' bench.
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.
4. Proper handwashing signage will be posted in all restrooms.
5. Public water fountains will be closed. The one public water fountain will be taped off and signage placed above the fountain stating it is closed.

### Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the bailiffs 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. Signage will be posted advising anyone who feels sick to stay home.
2. Face coverings will be required for all persons, including employees, entering the courthouse.

3. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the bailiff's 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.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including face mask and gloves and will have disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer available.

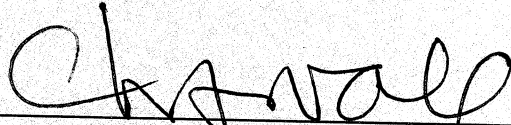
### Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean and disinfect the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 4 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean and disinfect the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff will be provided EPA-registered products that have an approved emerging viral pathogen claim for COVID-19. These products will be used according to label instructions.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

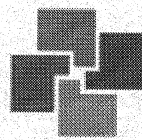
I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the mayor and City Manager, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

If a Judge or other staff member does test positive for COVID-19, the Judge will notify the other court staff in close contact with the member that an individual in the court has tested positive. The judge will notify the City Manager of the positive test by a member of the court's staff and request immediate appropriate cleaning and disinfecting of the court and court offices.

Date: 1/11/2021

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Presiding Judge of Municipal Court

Gwen J. Sims, MEd, RD, LD  
Interim Executive Director  
2223 West Loop South  
Houston, Texas 77027  
Tel: (713) 439-6000  
Fax: (713) 439-6327



Harris County  
**Public Health**  
NUTRITION AND CHRONIC  
DISEASE PREVENTION

Sherri D. Onyiego MD, PhD  
Local Health Authority  
Director, Nutrition and  
Chronic Disease Prevention

January 9, 2021

Honorable Chuck Noll  
Associate Judge  
City of Humble Municipal Court  
315 Bender Ave.  
Humble, TX 77338

RE: Recertification of COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Humble Municipal Court

Dear Judge Noll,

Thank you for submitting your revised COVID-19 Operating Plan and complementary recertification statement.

It is recognized that any in-person proceeding may increase risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Case counts, hospitalizations, as well as positivity rates in Harris County have continued to rise. These recent increases triggered Governor Abbott's GA-32 Order<sup>1</sup> in Harris County due to exceeding 15% COVID-19 hospital capacity in our Trauma Service Area region. This order allows for closing bars and reducing restaurant capacity from 75% to 50%. Additionally, the recent emergence of the UK COVID-19 variant in Harris County will begin contributing to increases in the metrics given this variant's increased transmissibility.

Unfortunately, when the level of disease is high in the community, gatherings will increase the likelihood of exposure despite the best precautions. Every activity incurs some amount of risk, which cannot be completely mitigated. Each activity must be weighed on the merits of its benefits compared to the incurred risks.

Harris County Public Health strongly recommends strict adherence to the public health prevention measures of wearing masking, proper hand hygiene, and social distancing measures which includes limiting in-person activities. However, we do recognize the consequences of limiting opportunities for due process to take place and the possible negative societal outcomes that might result. Thus, the risk of holding in-person proceedings may be lower than potentially increasing the number of young people and adults in justice-related congregate settings.

It is important to note that the wording in the recertification template presents a difficult choice to select as local conditions are currently not "conducive" to public gathering for people from different households. Based on the options presented in the recertification template, and with the current plans submitted, in-person hearings could be held if the benefit was deemed worth the potential for risk of exposure to SARS CoV-2.

In summary Based on our review of both the initial and revised plans submitted, we have determined that the Option 2- *"local pandemic conditions are conducive to in-person proceedings with modifications to the precautions and protocols in the previously-submitted in-person operating plan,"* presented in the

*HCPH is the local public health agency for the Harris County, Texas jurisdiction. It provides a wide variety of public health activities and services aimed at improving the health and well-being of the Harris County community.*

Follow HCPH on Twitter [@hcphtx](https://twitter.com/hcphtx) and like us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/hcphtx)

recertification template is suitable to recommend at this time with the following conditions and guidelines to help limit the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

We believe plans consistent with the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration for conducting jury proceedings provide guidelines that sufficiently limit opportunities for transmission through unnecessary exposure events. For this reason, we are advising all courts to strictly follow the guidelines submitted in the recertification statement with the following additions to all operating plans in Harris County:

- Willingness to adhere to all future and subsequent local guidance set forth by the Local Administrative Judge in coordination with public health.
- Include a plan to limit panel sizes.
- Include a plan to limit length of exposure, as much as possible. Although this does not eliminate risk of transmitting COVID-19, all measures to limit transmission must be taken.

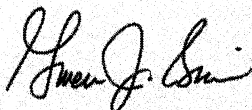
Additionally, specific to your plan, HCPH recommends the following additions:

- Update the date for providing non-essential in-person proceedings.
- Ensure that all hyperlinks in the re-certification agreement are active.
- Consider adding procedure for reporting cases to Harris County Public Health and for internal contact tracing.
  - For example: "If a judge or staff member does test positive for COVID-19, the judge will notify the other court staff in close contact and any other courts/departments sharing space that an individual in the court has tested positive. The judge will also notify the Office of Court Management to ensure that proper notification be made to the local health authorities so that contact tracing can be performed, and to the county facilities department so that the office space can be properly disinfected and cleaned."
- Consider adding what the City of Humble Municipal Court is doing to increase ability of defendants to resolve cases online (e.g. driving safety courses, paying court fines and fees online, etc.) that reduce the need for physical appearance in the courthouse.
- Consider using dividers where possible and regularly updating staff about COVID-19 health and safety guidelines.

At HCPH, our priority is to keep our communities healthy and reduce the spread of infection by slowing the rate of transmission. We appreciate your support in this effort.

Feel free to contact us at (832) 927-7500 to discuss further.

Sincerely,



Gwen J. Sims, MEd, RD, LD  
Interim Executive Director



Sherri D. Onyiego, MD, PhD  
Local Health Authority

Cc: Josh Stuckey, Chief Transitions Officer, Harris County

*HCPH is the local public health agency for the Harris County, Texas jurisdiction. It provides a wide variety of public health activities and services aimed at improving the health and well-being of the Harris County community.*

Follow HCPH on Twitter [@hcphtx](#) and like us on [Facebook](#)

Marva Gay, HCPH Sr. Assistant County Attorney, County Attorney's Office  
Michael McClendon, HCPH Director, Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response  
Dana Wiltz-Beckham, DVM, MPH, MBA, HCPH Director, Office of Science, Surveillance, and  
Technology  
Wendie Veloz, MSSW, HCPH Director, Office of Policy and Planning  
Scott Jeansonne, Compliance and Environmental Programs Division, Environmental Public  
Health Division

<sup>1</sup> [https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-32\\_continued\\_response\\_to\\_COVID-19\\_IMAGE\\_10-07-2020.pdf](https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-32_continued_response_to_COVID-19_IMAGE_10-07-2020.pdf)

*HCPH is the local public health agency for the Harris County, Texas jurisdiction. It provides a wide variety of public health activities and services aimed at improving the health and well-being of the Harris County community.*

Follow HCPH on Twitter [@hcphtx](#) and like us on [Facebook](#)