

COVID-19 Operating Plan

for the Keene Municipal Court

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the building housing the court, the municipal court of the City of Keene will implement and follow the protective measures detailed below:

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 June 9, 2020.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Each member participating in court proceedings shall take his or her own temperature prior to entering the building housing the Keene Municipal Court.
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. Judges and court staff are encouraged to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
4. Protective Measures: Staff are provided with hand sanitizer and sanitizing spray for workstations. Staff members are encouraged to bring their own gloves and masks. Hand Sanitizer shall be provided in the lobby and courtroom for the public. The public/defendants are only allowed into city hall in groups of ten standing at least six feet apart. Staff working the counter shall be separated from the public by security glass. Options available to handle cases by telephone, email, mail, and a twenty-four hour drop box are being encouraged to reduce any in-person dealings with court cases. Notices for these options have been posted on the court's website, city Facebook page, and are posted outside of City Hall and the Courtroom. Before any signature is required, the defendant/public will be required to use hand sanitizer. Any pen used by the public will be sprayed with disinfectant between use and then disposed of at end of day.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Dockets shall be staggered to prevent excessive numbers of litigants at one time.
2. Defendants will not be allowed to bring other guests with them to a hearing. Juvenile defendants shall only be accompanied by one parent/guardian and no other guests, including siblings.
3. Accommodations will be made to comply with the Open Courts provision, but at no time will the courtroom exceed 25% of its normal capacity. Jury trial scheduling will be dependent on orders and guidance issued by the Supreme Court of Texas, Court of Criminal Appeals, and the Office of Court Administration.

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 shall 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 shall be posted on the courts' website and Facebook 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 rescheduling the court date to a later date to be determined by the Judge or given alternatives to resolving their legal matter without an appearance in court.

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 six feet. Persons may be asked to wait in car until called in.
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. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snack rooms, have been closed to the public.
4. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of the courtroom shall be limited to ten individuals. This will be clearly posted on the door of the courtroom. 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 the 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 six feet between each space.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers and tissues have been placed at the front counter and near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, and in the hallways.
2. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" shall be posted in multiple locations in and outside of the courtroom.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, court staff 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.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building are encouraged to wear face coverings.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them.

Cleaning

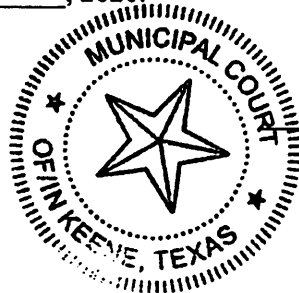
1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every three hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court 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.

Other

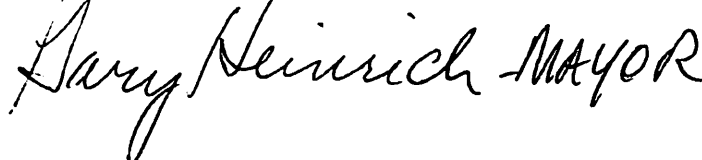
1. The Court will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and adjust as needed with continued collaboration with the mayor and the local health authority.

I have attempted to confer with all Municipal Court personnel in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and mayor, 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: June 2, 2020.




Toni D. Driver, Presiding Judge


Gary Heinrich MAYOR