

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Pharr City Judiciary

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 **Pharr** 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 June 15, 2020

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will do so when possible.
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 will be required to wash hands, wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
4. All contact with members of the public will be behind glass windows which have been in place at the Court.
5. Any in-person interaction in the courtroom shall occur behind plexiglass shields. Masks and gloves are available at all times for judge and court staff use.
6. Defendants are to stand in the designated spot (which has been measured to be 10 feet from the bench) in the courtroom when addressing the judge in person.

Scheduling

The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: All persons are set for hearings in groups of two. Hearings will be set with the option that Defendants use Zoom to access their hearings. If a hearing must be held in-person, only one defendant, their attorney and one witness at a time may be present to keep the number of persons in the courtroom at five if possible and not more than ten in any event.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
11 am – Magistrations	9 am – Code/City Ordinance Cases (Maximum 10 cases – 2 every 10 minutes)	11 am - Magistrations	9 am – Traffic Court - (Maximum 10 cases – 2 every 10 minutes)	9 am – Traffic Court - (Maximum 10 cases – 2 every 10 minutes)
2 pm – Traffic Court - (Maximum 10 cases)	11 am - Magistrations	4 pm – Traffic Court - (Maximum 10 cases – 2 every 10 minutes)	11 am - Magistrations	11 am - Magistrations
	2 pm – PreTrial Conferences (Maximum 10 cases – 2 every 10 minutes)		2 pm – PreTrial Conferences (Maximum 10 cases – 2 every 10 minutes)	

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 participating in non-essential hearings remotely via Zoom and/or being granted extensions of appearance deadlines.

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.
2. No more than two individuals not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator. If more than one individual from the same household is in an elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the elevator.
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.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

Gallery

5. 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.
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, 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.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, 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 judge's bench, and in the hallways.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations in the court building.

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.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the Court Bailiff screening for security will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit will be refused admittance to the court areas.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken prior to transport. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 99.6°F will not be transported to the court building.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including masks and disposable gloves.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be encouraged to wear face coverings at all times.
2. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.
3. No one will be refused service because they do not wear a mask.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every four (4) hours from Monday through Friday.
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. All Court staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.

4. All Court staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

I have attempted to confer with all judges in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the Local Health Authority of Hidalgo County and the mayor of the City of Pharr, as evidenced by their signatures below. I will ensure that all judges in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 6/1/2020



MARISSA CARRANZA HERNANDEZ

Presiding Judge of Municipal Court
City of Pharr

REVIEWED AND APPROVED:

Honorable Mayor Dr. Ambrosio Hernandez
Mayor, City of Pharr

Date: 6-9-2020

Honorable Edward M. Wylie
City of Pharr Emergency Management Coordinator,
Interim City Manager

Date: 6-8-2020