

White Settlement Municipal Court

COVID-19 Operating Plan

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 White Settlement 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 (minimum 6 feet), 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 2, 2020

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Due to the small size of the court we will self-monitor but be vigilant about watching each other for signs of illness. Before each docket all court staff will be checked for signs of fever utilizing touchless temperature measuring.
3. 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.
4. Judges and court staff who do not have a physical barrier of glass or plexiglass separating them from the general public will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: Glass partitions are in place between the court clerk and customers approaching the window. On docket days hand sanitizer will be available to staff and court participants, those without facial coverings will be provided a face mask, if available, before entering court. Social distancing will be maintained by markings on the ground, minimizing the occupancy of the courtroom to the 25% of maximum occupancy.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
The number of individuals who will be scheduled for any docket shall be no more than 50% of the occupancy of the courtroom . Staging areas shall be established and marked by distancing tape in the lobby area where any overflow may wait until sufficient spacing may be achieved within the courtroom to allow them access. Only those with cases before the court will be admitted to the courtroom unless the defendant requires assistance of an aid who will be allowed access to help as necessary. All seating will be positioned so as to maintain social distancing during court proceedings. Between each docket the courtroom will be wiped down with disinfectant (alcohol, bleach mixture or other sanitizing agent as is available)

Anyone who feels uneasy about entering the courtroom during this time may request a reset or video meeting with the Judge or Prosecutor. Those requesting a video meeting will be required to sign for a date and time for their video meeting and if they fail to attend the video meeting they will be required to appear at the next scheduled docket for their case in the courtroom.

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 allowing them to schedule video meeting .

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. As the court facilities are in single story buildings no elevator restrictions are required. However, weather permitting, doors entering the facility shall be propped open during court times so as to allow entry into and out of the buildings without requiring the touching of door handles.
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 will be spaced so that social distancing requirements are maintained

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 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 of the court building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, 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, court staff will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
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 mask, gloves and hand sanitizer.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times unless they are separated from staff by a barrier such as glass or plexiglass.
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.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 30 minutes will be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.

Cleaning

1. Court staff will clean the common areas of the courtroom so that common spaces, including entry and exit handles, and countertops are cleaned before and after each in-person court docket.
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

Due to the ongoing public concern for the potential virus spread the court will grant an extension to anyone requesting one who desires to utilize any video meeting system that is available before the next scheduled in person docket date.

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 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: 9/22/2020

Craig Magnuson

Presiding Judge of Municipal Court