

Re-Certification of the COVID-19 Operating Plan City of Mesquite Judiciary



To ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the court of the City of Mesquite 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 and virtual 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, county judge and mayor and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. Judges will begin setting virtual proceedings no sooner than January 18, 2021.

JUDGE AND COURT STAFF HEALTH SAFETY

1. Judges and Court Staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Judges and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements:
Judges or Court Staff who do not feel well 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. Protective Measures:
Judges and Court Staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.

HEARINGS

REMOTE: Dockets will be handled remotely by telephone conference or with Zoom, unless otherwise notified by the Office of Court Administration.

- Jail arraignments are conducted by video; therefore, inmates are not transported from the jail to the court building.

IN-PERSON: Hearings will be scheduled in-person only as a “last resort”. Key barriers to remote hearings are lack of technology by the defendant, lack of technology skills by the defendant, or any other acceptable barrier that prohibits a remote proceeding.

COURT BUILDING PROTOCOLS

FACE COVERINGS: All individuals entering the court building should always wear face coverings.

RESTROOMS: Public restrooms are single occupancy.

ELEVATOR: No more than two individuals will be permitted in the elevator at a time.

FIRST FLOOR LOBBY: Social distancing measures in this area will allow a maximum of 12 people. Floors are marked for six-foot distancing. Others will be asked to wait outside the building until space is available. The immediate area outside the building is also marked for social distancing purposes.

SECOND FLOOR LOBBY: Social distancing measures in this area will allow a maximum of 12 people. Floors are marked for six-foot distancing. Seating areas are also marked for social distancing purposes. Traffic will be monitored by Court staff.

Cleaning

1. Facilities cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building a minimum of every six hours.
2. Facilities cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with the coronavirus.
3. Facilities cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside each courtroom, and outside each of the clerk windows.
2. Tissues are available in the courtroom.
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.

COURTROOM OPERATIONS

1. All persons will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge’s bench, and clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating areas have been arranged in such a way so there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.
3. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom to enhance social distancing has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by Court Staff.

Gallery – All proceedings will be virtual and open to the public unless otherwise notified by the Office of Court Administration

Screening

1. Individuals attempting to enter the court building will be questioned by the Mesquite Marshals as to their health. 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 they will be refused admittance to the court building and receive accommodations, such as resetting their proceeding.
2. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including face masks and gloves.

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, docket 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.


COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Information for the dispositioning of pre-judgement cases online, as well as scheduling and participating in a virtual proceeding will be communicated through various channels including language in the Appearance Notices, news releases, city publications, social media, and the Court website.

The City of Mesquite Court will continue to assess alternative strategies that will capitalize on remote court operations and enhance the public health of our staff and the community.

I have conferred with all judges 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 all judges utilizing the courtrooms within the court building covered by this Operating Plan will conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 12/22/2020



Presiding Judge of Municipal Court

CITY OF MESQUITE, TEXAS

Affirmation of Consultation by Local Health Authority and Mayor of Mesquite

Mesquite Judge Detra G. Hill presents the attached Operating Plan from the template provided by the Texas Office of Court Administration for discussion and consultation with the Dallas County Local Health Authority and the Mayor of the City of Mesquite, Texas to satisfy the prerequisites set out in the Texas Office of Court Administration guidelines Updated December 17, 2020.

Reviewed by: Barry Jenkins
Local Health Authority, City of Mesquite Texas

Date: 12-28-20

Reviewed by: [Signature]
Mayor, City of Mesquite Texas

Date: 12/29/20