

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Ector County Judiciary

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, courthouse personnel, judges, and other individuals entering the Ector County courthouse, the courts of **Ector County, Texas** will implement the following protective measures, to the extent implementation can be successful and the necessary resources, supplies, protective equipment, and personnel can be provided and are available:

General Conditions:

1. All judges and court staff will comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals (the "Courts"), and the directives, guidelines, and recommendations issued by the Office of Court Administration ("OCA"), including the protocol for conducting "***in-person***" ***proceedings*** pursuant to the guidelines issued by OCA regarding social distancing, maximum group size, and other necessary restrictions and precautions.
2. Judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authorities and the county judge. This Operating Plan will be modified as conditions and circumstances within the county so require.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential "***in-person***" ***proceedings*** no sooner than June 1, 2020. All "***in-person***" ***proceedings*** shall not exceed or be contrary to the maximum group size as designated by local, state, national, and judicial directives, whichever is most restrictive.

Judge and Court Staff Health:

1. Judges and court staff who can remotely perform the essential functions of their job will telework when possible.
2. Judges and court staff will comply with the following monitoring requirements:
 - a. All will self-monitor and report any medical concerns that are consistent with the symptoms related to COVID-19 to the appropriate health authorities.
 - b. The local administrative district judge will monitor Ector County health and senior service statistics, as the information becomes available. Relevant information will thereafter be disseminated to all courts.
 - c. The local administrative district judge will review, and disseminate to the other courts, the following information, as it is provided: (i) Texas Department of State Health Services Minimum Standard Health Protocols for COVID-19; (ii) applicable Emergency Executive Orders; (iii) Emergency Orders issued by the Texas Supreme Court or the local administrative district judge; and (iv) guidance and directives issued by OCA.
3. Judges or court staff who (a) feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°F, (b) are experiencing new or increasing signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as persistent coughing or sneezing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or other flu-like symptoms, or (c) have, or are believed to have, been in known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19,

will not be permitted to enter the courthouse or any courtroom, and should seek medical advice.

4. Judges and court staff will be encouraged to wear face coverings.
5. Judges and court staff will at all times practice (a) necessary social distancing, and (b) appropriate hygiene recommendations.
6. **Protective Measures:** COVID-19 symptom signage have been posted in each court office. Hand sanitizer dispensers or products, or other appropriate disinfectants, have been placed in the offices of each judge and court staff member. Appropriate face coverings will be available for use by court personnel. Computer keyboards, copier keypads, cabinets, knobs, and any items that may have been touched in that person's office and staff common areas will be cleaned each day by court staff or courthouse cleaning staff. No more than three (3) persons will be allowed at a time in a court staff or judge's office.

Scheduling:

1. To maintain the lowest possible degree of occupancy in the courthouse during designated hours of courthouse operation, the courts will coordinate the scheduling of all ***"in-person" proceedings.***

Vulnerable Populations:

1. Persons who are over the age of sixty-five (65) years, and persons 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 in orders setting hearings, dockets notices, and other communications notifying persons who are in "vulnerable populations" of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable person and to request necessary accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted on the courts' websites and in conspicuous locations in the courthouse.
3. "Vulnerable populations" who are scheduled to appear for a court proceeding will be encouraged to wear face coverings or be advised of their option to participate or appear in the proceeding remotely, if such accommodation is possible, and if not possible, the proceeding will be reset to another date so that "in-person" attendance may occur.

Social Distancing (Courthouse and Courtrooms):

1. All persons who are permitted to enter the courthouse will be required to maintain adequate social distancing throughout all public common areas, hallways, and courtrooms where the public might gather.
2. All persons who are permitted to enter the courthouse, but who are not from the same household, will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least six (6) feet.
3. No more than two (2) persons who are not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator. If more than one (1) person from the same household has entered an elevator, no other persons will be permitted in the same elevator.

4. To ensure social distancing, restrooms in the courthouse will have postings affixed to each door stating the appropriate and maximum capacity of each restroom.
5. The maximum number of persons permitted to be present in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined, will be posted, and will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
6. The maximum capacity of persons who can be present in each courtroom has been determined, will be posted, and will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
7. The gallery of the courtroom will be marked to identify appropriate social distancing for seating. Until contrary guidance is provided, seating will be limited to every other row.
8. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, clerk's station, court reporter's station, and bailiff's station have been arranged to maintain social distancing of at least six (6) feet between each space.

Hygiene:

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers will be placed at the courthouse entrances, by the elevator doors on each floor, the doors of each courtroom, and the bathroom doors.
2. Tissues will be placed near the door of each courtroom, at counsel tables, the witness stands, the clerk, court reporter, and bailiff stations, on the judges' benches, in the jury rooms, and the hallways.
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 courthouse.

Screening:

1. Signage, in English and Spanish languages, identifying COVID-19 symptoms will be posted on, and by, all entrances into the courthouse, and in the area of the courthouse security station.
2. When a person attempts to enter the courthouse, courthouse security officers will ask that person if he or she has read the posted COVID-19 signage and if the person is, or has been, (a) experiencing feverish symptoms, elevated temperature, persistent coughing or sneezing, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, and other COVID-19 related symptoms, or (b) known to be in close contact with any person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Any person who answers or indicates "yes" to any of these inquiries will not be permitted to enter the courthouse or any courtroom.
3. When a person attempts to enter the courthouse, courthouse security officers who are able to determine if such person has a temperature that equals or exceeds 100.0°F, will not permit such person to enter the courthouse or any courtroom.
4. Inmates and detainees who are to be transported to the courthouse from jails and detention facilities, will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms and have their temperature taken by law enforcement personnel prior to transport. Any inmate or detainee that is determined to have or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms, or to have a temperature that equals or exceeds 99.6°F, will not be transported to the courthouse.
5. Staff who are responsible for screening persons seeking entrance to the courthouse will be provided personal protective equipment, including appropriate face coverings.

Face Coverings:

1. All persons entering the courthouse will be encouraged to wear face coverings at all times.
2. Persons seeking entrance to the courthouse will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them. If a person does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face covering will be provided.

Cleaning:

1. Courthouse cleaning staff will clean and sanitize the common areas of the courthouse and surfaces in and around the courtrooms each day after court proceedings have adjourned.
2. Court staff will clean and sanitize affected areas of the courtrooms after every hearing has concluded. Courtroom witness microphones will be cleaned and sanitized by court staff after each witness's testimony has concluded.
3. Courthouse cleaning staff have been provided adequate and effective COVID-19 cleaning supplies.
4. Courthouse cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning and sanitizing techniques, and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

The undersigned has conferred with the other thirteen (13) judges of Ector County (district courts, county courts, justice courts, and associate courts), the county judge, and the local health authorities of this county regarding this Operating Plan, and all concur and approve this Plan. Correspondence and documentation supporting these efforts and the approval of this Plan by the county judge and other appropriate local county health officials, is attached to this Operating Plan. I represent and ensure that the judges of the Ector County courts who are covered and affected by this Operating Plan will conduct court operations and proceedings consistent with the provisions of this Plan.

SIGNED the 27th day of May, 2020.



**W. STACY TROTTER,
PRESIDING JUDGE, 358th DISTRICT COURT
LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE**