

**COVID-19 Operating Plan
for the District, County Court at Law Court, and Justice of the Peace Courts of
Cass County, Texas**

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 **Cass County** 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, as deemed appropriate by the Presiding Judge of the Court.
2. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely or within the proscribed social distancing recommendations of the National, State and Local Health authorities.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the Cass County.
4. Judges may begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings after June 1, 2020 at the direction of the presiding Judge of the court.

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: Each staff member will be self-reporting and have been trained on the symptoms to monitor. If a staff member reports symptoms, they will be required to self-quarantine.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.4°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 be required to self-quarantine and seek medical advice.
4. Judges and court staff will be permitted to wear face coverings in courtroom settings, will be required to practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: All non-courtroom contact will be via tele-communications.

Scheduling

The separate courts will evaluate and coordinate their schedules on an ongoing basis to minimize the number of in-person hearings being conducted at the same time in the same courthouse. Justice of the Peace Courts will schedule as appropriate for the particular matter and courtroom space being utilized.

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.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by permitting teleconferencing during hearings or limiting the number of in-person individuals during hearings.

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. 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 snackrooms, have been closed to the public. Hallways outside Courtrooms will be arraigned for social distancing and person limits enforced.

Gallery

4. 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.
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 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 will be made available for public use in or near each courtroom.
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, as necessary, for each space being utilized by the courts.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations around the various courtrooms and court spaces.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, Courthouse Security/ Bailiffs 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, Courthouse Security/Bailiffs will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.4°F will be refused admittance to the courtrooms.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court buildings 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 100.4°F will not be transported to the court building.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the courtrooms will be provided personal protective equipment.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court rooms will be offered disposable face coverings for use while in the court room or awaiting hearings in portions of the Courthouse while awaiting hearings or testifying. Individual courts, upon the direction of the presiding Judge, may require face coverings pursuant to orders of the court.

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 to five hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the District and CCL courtrooms twice during the day when courtrooms are being utilized.
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.

I have conferred with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan as well as communicated with Justice of the Peace judges with courtrooms in different locations. In developing the plan, I consulted with the county judge, who is copied on the email providing your this plan. I will attempt to ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: May 22, 2020


2:14 pm, May 22, 2020
Unique Digital Signature Identifier:
130333901396970540-1590174899575

Bill Miller, 5th Judicial District of Texas
Cass County Administrative District Judge