

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Statutory Probate Court of Collin 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 Judge of the Statutory Probate Court of Collin County, Texas, will implement the following protective measures:

General

1. The Judge 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. The Judge will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The Judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and the county judge and will adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
4. The Judge will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no later than July 31, 2020.

Judge and Court Staff Health

5. The Judge and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
6. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: The Judge and court staff will individually monitor their health and will report any changes as necessary. Staff will follow Collin County Human Resources policies about reporting to work, staying home from work, and paid/unpaid leave.
7. The Judge and court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0°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.
8. The Judge and court staff will practice appropriate hygiene recommendations in the courtroom, which may include one or more of the following: wearing face coverings, practicing social distancing, and/or having Plexiglas dividers installed.
9. Protective Measures: Gloves will be available to all staff members for direct contact with members of the public.

Vulnerable Populations

10. 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.
11. The Judge will include information on orders setting in-person 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 county websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building.
12. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for in-person court proceedings will be accommodated by remote appearance or other procedures determined by the court on a case-by-case basis.

Social Distancing

13. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the courtroom will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.

Gallery

14. 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.

15. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating will be staggered to promote social distancing.

Well

16. 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, where possible.

17. Plexiglas barriers will be installed in appropriate places in the courtroom.

Hygiene

18. Hand sanitizer will be available in the courtroom.

19. 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.

Screening

20. The Sheriff will be requested to ensure that persons being transported by the Sheriff to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken prior to transport. The Sheriff will be requested to ensure that persons with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 100.0° F will not be transported to the court building.

Face Coverings

21. We will require all individuals in the courtroom to wear face coverings at all times, except on specific findings by the court as necessary on an individualized basis.

Cleaning

22. The courtroom will provide paper towels and sanitizer, and each court participant will be required to wipe down their own work area before and after each proceeding.

Other

We may be unable to hold in-person proceedings if the county's courthouse facilities are not in compliance with Texas Supreme Court orders, OCA requirements, and this plan.

Signed June 17, 2020.



Weldon S. Copeland, Judge Presiding