

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Hood County Judiciary

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 **Hood 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.
2. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework if the Judge deems it necessary.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Social distancing and compliance with all policies of OCA, the Governor of Texas, the Texas Supreme Court, and the Criminal Court of Appeals of Texas.
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, may wear face coverings and will practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.

Scheduling

1. The following court scheduling practices are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
2. The court will conduct essential and non-essential non-jury civil, criminal and family proceedings in accordance with local and state directives, and such will be conducted remotely when possible.
3. The court will conduct essential proceedings in a manner consistent with the best practices for reducing the threat of exposure to COVID-19 (essential proceedings include,

but are not limited to: criminal magistration, CPS removal, temporary restraining orders, temporary injunctions, juvenile detention hearings, and family violence protective orders)

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. A notice to individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations 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 allowing such persons to appear and testify remotely.

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. Breakrooms and snackrooms are closed to the public.

Gallery

4. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom will be determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
5. The gallery of the courtroom will be marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

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 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 in the court building.

Screening

1. A sign shall be posted at each entry door stating that if an individual is feeling feverish; has a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or has been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19, that individual will be refused admittance to the court building.
2. 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.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including face coverings.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building may wear face coverings.
2. Individuals may bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, and desires one, a disposable face mask will be provided.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 24 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms, 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.

I have conferred with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I also consulted with the local health authority, and took into consideration all Emergency Orders from the Texas Supreme Court and the Texas Criminal Court of Appeals, and Executive Orders of the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, and the guidance provided by the Office of Court Administration of Texas. 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:

May 13, 2020



Ralph H. Walton Jr.

Judge, 355th Judicial District and
Local Administrative District Judge