

## COVID-19 Operating Plan for Jim Wells County

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 Jim Wells 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 with conditions in the county.
4. Judges may begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than July 1, 2020.

### Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judge and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will work remotely whenever possible.
2. Judges and court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.4°F, are experiencing cold or flu-like symptoms, or 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 have had known close contact with a person who is confirmed or probable to have COVID-19, will not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice.
3. Judges and court staff will follow the county's requirements for wearing face coverings. Judges and all court staff shall always practice social distancing and follow appropriate hygiene recommendations.

### Scheduling

Judges must coordinate scheduling of any in-person proceedings to reduce the number of people in the courthouse/county buildings at one time.

### Vulnerable Populations

1. Based upon information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the following conditions constitute whether you are a member of a vulnerable population:
  - People 65 years and older
  - People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility
  - People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, *particularly if not well controlled*, including:
    - People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
    - People who have serious heart conditions

#### People who are immunocompromised

- Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications
  - People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
  - People with diabetes
  - People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
  - People with liver disease
2. Each judge shall ensure that if an individual requests to be identified as a member of the Vulnerable Population, they are able to contact the court to request accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted on the courts' websites and on doors entering the court building.
  3. Any requests for those that need accommodations as a member of a vulnerable population who are scheduled for court can be made if requested. The Court must be contacted prior to the set court date in order to schedule/make these accommodations.

#### **Social Distancing**

##### *Household Members*

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.

##### *General Public*

##### *Gallery*

The County will develop a seating diagram in accordance with social distancing guidelines for each courtroom of the county. The diagram will designate seating for all attendees at each courtroom.

##### *Well*

In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, 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.

##### *Bathrooms*

Only one person at a time will be allowed in any restroom.

#### **Hygiene**

1. All persons entering the court building should follow proper hygiene practices including washing hands often, avoiding close contact with other people, and covering coughs and sneezes.
2. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed in the building.

#### **Screening**

1. Court building security personnel will ask each person entering the building if they feel feverish, or are experiencing 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 have had known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. A person who responds affirmatively to this inquiry will not be permitted to enter the building housing the courtroom.

2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, Court building security personnel will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. If the indicated temperature equals or exceeds 100.4<sup>0</sup> F, following two consecutive temperature measurements by infrared thermometer, the individual will not be permitted to enter the court building.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken before transport. If the inmates Temperature equals or exceeds 100.4<sup>0</sup> or the inmate demonstrates any symptoms of COVID-19, the inmate will not be transported.
4. Court building security personnel will, to the extent available to the county government, be provided face masks, gloves and hand sanitizer for their use while on duty.
5. To the extent any of these screening measures are impractical or cost-prohibitive, alternate means of achieving such measures, such as signage, may be implemented if approved by local health authorities.

### **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times, unless circumstances specific to the purpose for which that person is present at the court building require that the face covering be temporarily removed. After completing the task which required removal of the face covering, the person shall resume wearing the face covering. All face coverings worn must cover the wearer's mouth and nose at all times, unless temporarily excused as provided in this paragraph. Failure or refusal to wear face coverings as provided in this paragraph will result in immediate expulsion of the person failing or refusing to wear the face covering in compliance with this paragraph.
2. Persons seeking to be admitted to the court building for the purpose of observing or participating in an in-person judicial proceeding who are not wearing a face covering, will be provided a disposable face mask, if the county government authority which owns the court building has an adequate supply of face masks. Failure or refusal to wear a face mask or face covering as provided in paragraph 1 "Face Coverings" or this paragraph will result in immediate expulsion of the person failing or refusing to wear the face covering in compliance with this paragraph or paragraph 1 "Face Coverings".

### **Cleaning**

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building and ensure common spaces are cleaned twice a day.
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.

**Other**

1. Bailiffs and courthouse security personnel are authorized to enforce all provisions of this Operating Plan.
2. Bailiffs and courthouse security personnel may refuse entry to anyone who does not comply with this Operating Plan, or refuses to comply with the directives of those enforcing this Operating Plan.
3. Any person may be removed from the courtroom and court building at the discretion of the Bailiff or courthouse security personnel unless they are a litigant/defendant and then only with the approval of the judge presiding over their case
4. All presiding judiciary will work closely with each County Judge and Commissioners Court to ensure that all feasible safety precautions are being followed.

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and county judge, documentation of which is attached to this plan. 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.

Signed this 17 day of July, 2020.



Richard C. Terrell  
Local Administrative