

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Mitchell 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 Mitchell 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 will adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
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 when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Judges and Court staff are required to report any exposure to a person exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.
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 will be encouraged to wear face coverings, and required to practice social distancing and appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
5. Protective Measures: Maintaining a social distance of at least six feet, regular handwashing and use of hand sanitizers which have been placed throughout the courthouse.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Docket calls will be staggered throughout the day to limit occupancy in the courtroom and any party wishing to appear remotely shall notify the court 48 hours prior to their scheduled appearance time.

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 (a copy of which is attached).
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by providing any necessary protective equipment or postponement to a later date.

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. No more than two individuals not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator. If more than one individual from the same household is in an elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the elevator.
3. Each restroom has been evaluated to determine the appropriate capacity to ensure social distancing.

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.

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 elevators on each floor and outside of each courtroom.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, and on the judges' benches.

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 court building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the courtroom, Courthouse Security 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. 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.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be encouraged to wear face coverings at all times.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided if the supply is available.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided face masks and encouraged to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every twenty-four hours, when in use.
2. Court building cleaning staff or bailiffs 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.

We have conferred with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, the local health authority and county judge were consulted. We 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: _____




Mark Merrell
Mitchell County Judge



David Hall
Judge, 1st Multi-County Court at Law




Rick Grissam
Justice of the Peace, Precincts 1 & 4

James Williams
Justice of the Peace, Precincts 2 & 3


Glen Harrison
Judge, 32nd District Court

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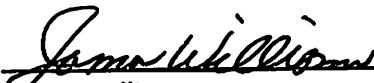
Date: 5-15-20



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