

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Amarillo Municipal Court 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 municipal court of the City of Amarillo 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 presiding judge of the municipal court will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and mayor and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. Judges will not set non-essential in person proceedings at this time.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff monitoring requirements: Follow all minimum standard protocols required by the City of Amarillo Human Resources Department and recommended by the City of Amarillo Environmental Health Department.
2. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0⁰ 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.
3. Court Bailiffs and Courtroom Clerks will be required to wear face coverings while court is in session. Bailiffs and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations when not in court chambers.
4. Protective Measures: Masks, gloves, disinfectant wipes, and hand sanitizer will be provided to all staff.
5. All Court Clerks and Courtroom Staff have been trained on the proper use of personal protective equipment.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: All proceedings occur remotely unless court participants are unable to successfully participate in a remote hearing for reasons beyond the court's control. The court will conduct in-person proceedings as needed and limit the number of people in each in-person proceeding to ensure there is adequate social distancing. We will maintain occupancy as recommended by the City of Amarillo Environmental Health Department.

2. In-person Proceedings will be used only if all reasonable efforts do not permit the hearing to be conducted remotely, for example:
 - a. One or more participant lacks technology and appropriate technology cannot be reasonably supplied. Examples of the lack of technology include
 - i. lack of access to a computer, tablet or other device with internet video capability
 - ii. lack of access to a mobile phone with internet video capability; or
 - iii. lack of access to an internet connection.
 - b. One or more participant lacks skill, training, or expertise in remote communication.
 - c. One or more parties or participants have a physical or mental disability affecting participation and appropriate accommodation cannot be reasonably made;
 - d. One or more participant lacks a telephone or residence and has appeared in person without being summoned by the court; or,
 - e. The lack or unavailability of an interpreter who can assist the individual in communication during a videoconference hearing.
3. All court participants are provided the court's email address, website address and telephone number to inform the court if they believe the participant, counsel, a witness, interpreter or translator, or other participant cannot participate remotely.
4. In person trials or contested hearings are not scheduled at this 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. The Court includes information on the court's website and in all 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.
3. Vulnerable populations who appear in person are accommodated. The Court

Social Distancing

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain an adequate social distance of at least 6 feet. Signs and floor markings have been posted indicating the same.
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 are closed to the public.

Gallery

1. 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.

2. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.
3. 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 Amarillo Public Health Department's poster "Amarillo Prepared: Coronavirus Prevention Tips" is displayed in multiple locations in the court building and on the court's website.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, a court bailiff or other trained city employee 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 and will be given an instructional flyer on how to reschedule their court hearing.
2. When an individual attempts to enter the court building, a court bailiff or other trained city employee will use a no-contact, infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the court building and will be rescheduled for hearing at a later date.
3. The court will continue to see incarcerated individuals via videoconferencing within 48 hours of arrest.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves, masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building are required to always wear face coverings.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring a mask with them, but if the individual does not have a mask, a disposable face mask will be provided.
3. Any person, who for medical reasons cannot wear a mask, will be provided information regarding virtual court. If the unmasked person is unable to participate in a remote hearing, they will be treated as vulnerable population and accommodated accordingly.

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, Monday through Friday.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms at the end of each day the courtroom is used.

3. Court staff will clean the digital signature pen pad and all common surfaces in the courtroom after each court session.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
5. 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 consulted with the local environmental health authority 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. Date: 12/30/2020



Handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Tomlinson".

Presiding Judge of Municipal Court