

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Balch Springs City 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 court of **Balch Springs** 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 begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than July 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:
 - A. Each municipal court employee, entering court facilities to conduct scheduled court business shall be required to complete the Employee Health Monitoring questionnaire upon entry. Court facilities include the clerks' office and the courtroom.
 - B. It is recommended that employees, judges, and any other persons entering court facilities to conduct scheduled court business have their temperature taken upon initial arrival at court facilities. Court facilities include the clerks' office and the courtroom. (Refer to Item #3 below.)
 - C. Non-contact Forehead Infrared thermometers shall be used for employee screenings. Screeners may confirm readings with thermometers with probe covers, if needed.
 - D. The City Marshal or a Deputy City Marshal shall ensure each staff member is screened and results are documented. If a staff member has a positive screening, the Court Administrator and Presiding Judge shall be notified.
3. Judges, court staff, or any other person performing their job function at court facilities 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 court facilities and should seek medical advice.

4. Judges, court staff, and any other person performing their job function within municipal court should wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
5. Protective Measures: Court staff must wear masks and gloves when interacting with the public. Court staff must use hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) immediately after each interaction with any member of the public. Court staff must also use hand sanitizer after handling each piece of mail.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: No more than thirteen (13) court users (defendants, witnesses, member of the public) will be allowed in the gallery of the courtroom at one time; 15 in the jury waiting room; 6 in the lobby. Court users will be provided a phone number (972-557-6072) to call the court when they arrive in the parking lot. Court staff will inquire how many persons will be entering the courtroom. Once space is available, court staff will contact the court user via phone and direct them to enter the building. If a court user does not have a phone, that person should check-in with the Marshall, and that person will either be provided a place to wait to be called into the courtroom that is a distance of at least six feet from all other persons or asked to remain in their vehicle and a Marshall will contact them when occupancy is open.

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 having their court date rescheduled or having their case heard through remote capabilities.

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 between individuals.
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, including break rooms and snack rooms, have been closed to the public.

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. Seating is limited to every other row. A maximum of fourteen (14) persons will be allowed in the seating area of the gallery.

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, 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 on each floor of the court building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, a screening questionnaire will inquire if the person has experienced: 1) feeling feverish or a measured temperature of greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit; 2) have a cough 3) shortness of breath; 4) repeatedly shaking or with chills; 5) headaches; 6) sore throat; 7) new loss of taste or sense of smell; 8) diarrhea; 9) muscle pain; 10) 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. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the City Marshal or Deputy City Marshal will use an 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.
3. 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.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including masks and gloves.

Face Coverings

1. As facemasks are recommended by the CDC, it is recommended that all individuals entering the court building wear face coverings at all times. Disposable masks will be provided upon request.
2. A designated receptacle will be provided at exits to collect used facemasks.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every four hours during business 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 that are EPA grade. A list of EPA approved cleaning supplies for COVID-19 can be found on the CDC website.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

I have attempted to confer with all judges of the Balch Springs Municipal Court regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and mayor, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of the Rowlett Municipal Court conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 5/31/2020


Presiding Judge of Municipal Court