

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Bedford Municipal Court

Purpose

Courts have a responsibility not only to take steps to ensure the health and safety of those entering a court building for court proceedings, but also to reassure visitors that the courts are working to ensure visitors' health and safety so that they feel safe returning to the courthouse. Because of the courts' unique ability to compel participants to attend versus other entities who may open for individuals to voluntarily visit, this responsibility is even more important.

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the area of Bedford City Hall Building – A which houses the Municipal Court, the Bedford Municipal Court 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 (OCA) 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 will 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 8, 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 will not come to work if they develop COVID-19 symptoms that cannot be attributed to another noncontagious health condition.
3. Judges or Court Staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.4°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. Protective measures: Masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer have been provided. Court Staff have been encouraged to frequently wash their hands and continue to properly social distance.

Court Docket Schedule

The following Court schedule has been established to reduce occupancy in the Court building. Throughout each Phase of Court, "paper-lite" processes will be used whenever possible:

1. Phase 1 – Current – Moving forward
 - A. Digital Court

2. Phase 2 – July 8, 2020 to July 31, 2020
 - A. Plea Docket (limited capacity)
 - B. Juvenile Docket

3. Phase 3 – August 1, 2020 – Moving forward
 - A. Plea Docket
 - B. Show Cause
 - C. Pre-Capias Show Cause
 - D. Cash Bond Docket
 - E. Surety Bond Docket
 - F. Appearance Bond Docket
 - G. Community Service Docket
 - H. Delinquent Docket

4. Phase 4 – September 1, 2020 – Moving forward
 - A. Jury Trials
 - B. Bench Trials
 - C. Property Hearings

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. Judges 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 Municipal Court website and in the lobby of the Municipal Court.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by allowing them to request a digital court date and/or set aside a specific date and time without other court defendants. Accommodations will be made for defendants identified and deemed to be considered as part of the vulnerable population.

Social Distancing

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court lobby and courtroom will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
2. No more than two individuals at each designated location not from the same household will be permitted in each of the service lines in the lobby of the municipal court, while still allowing one individual (two if from the same household) at the service window. 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.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms have been closed to the public.
5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the lobby and courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by the Bailiff/Warrant Officer and Court Staff.
6. The lobby of the Municipal Court has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing.
7. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to 15 persons at this time.
8. In the courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, Judge's bench, clerk's station, court reporter desk, and Bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way so there is proper social distancing.
9. Defendants appearing in open court will be required to stand at a designated point in front of the bar when they address the Court.
10. Municipal Court and Teen Court office areas are not accessible to the public, therefore Judges and Court Staff will still maintain social distancing as much as possible in the non-public areas.
11. Clear plexiglass has been installed between Court Staff workstations to maintain proper social distance.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the Municipal Court and at the customer service window. Defendants will be requested to sanitize their hands prior to being assisted by municipal court staff.
2. Signs reminding people to clean your hands often, avoid close contact, cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others, cover coughs and sneezes, and what to clean and disinfect have been placed at the building entrance just outside the Court lobby.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" is posted in the Municipal Court lobby.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court lobby, Court Staff 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 into the courtroom.

2. When individuals attempt to enter the court lobby, the Municipal Court Bailiff will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.4°F will be refused admittance to the court lobby.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including a mask and gloves.

Face Coverings

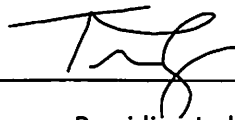
1. All non-employees entering the courtroom will be required to wear face coverings at all times.
2. All non-employees will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if they do not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.
3. All non-employees who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided a mask and required to wear it while in the court building if the supply is available.

Cleaning

1. Facilities Maintenance Staff will clean the common areas of the Court lobby so that common spaces are cleaned daily, while Municipal Court Staff will clean the lobby counter tops every few hours.
2. Facilities Maintenance Staff will clean the courtroom between every hearing, between morning and/or afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Municipal Court Staff have been provided cleaning supplies by the Facility Maintenance division which has shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Municipal Court Staff have been provided appropriate personal protective equipment to conduct all cleaning.

In developing the plan, direction was taken from the Office of Court Administration. All Court Staff will be made aware of this operating plan.

Date: 6/5/2020



Presiding Judge of Municipal Court