

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Brownwood Municipal Court

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the building housing the court, Brownwood 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 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 Municipal Judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and the mayor, and adjust this plan as necessary with conditions in the Municipal Court.
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: Temperatures will be taken of all Judges and Court Staff upon entering the building for the day.
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 may wear face coverings for hearings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
5. Protective Measures: court staff working the service window are separated from the public by a window. Staff are provided with hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes for work stations, gloves, and masks. Hand Sanitizer is provided in the lobby for customers. Signs and floor stickers have been placed to encourage social distancing while waiting at the service window. Options available to handle cases by phone, email, mail, and a 24 hour drop box are being encouraged to reduce any in-person dealings with court cases. Notices for these options have been posted on the court's website, mailed, and are mentioned on the court's phone answering system. Signatures on court documents will be required only if necessary, and when required give away pens will be provided to keep contact to a minimum.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Each hearing will consist of no more than ten (10) persons. In between each hearing, thirty (30) minutes will be allowed to properly clean and sanitize. Defendants will not be allowed to bring other guests with them to a hearing. Juvenile defendants shall only be accompanied by one parent/guardian and no other guests including siblings. Accommodations will be made to comply with the Open Courts Provision but at no time will the Courtroom exceed 25% normal Courtroom Capacity.

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. *"COVID19 NOTICE - Please contact the court to make other arrangements for a hearing if you are over age 65 or have 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."*
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by scheduling a phone conference with the judge, prosecutor, and clerk.

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. 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.

Gallery

4. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom will be 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. Seats are covered with disposable coverings and will be replaced and cleaned between each hearing.

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 the 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 in the court building.

Screening

1. When individuals enter the court building, an 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.
2. When individuals enter the court building, an employee will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 99.6°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including a face covering and gloves.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building for court hearings will be required 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.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided surgical masks and required 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 daily. Cleaning staff are also periodically wiping down frequently touched surfaces such as doors and countertops throughout each day.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, 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.

In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and the mayor for the City of Brownwood, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of court in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: Click here to enter a date

MAY 20, 2020



Presiding Judge

Brownwood Municipal Court