

## Amended

# Joint COVID-19 Operating Plan for Maverick, Dimmit, and Zavala Counties and the Cities of Eagle Pass, Crystal City, and Carrizo Springs 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 **Maverick, Dimmit, and Zavala Counties and the Cities of Eagle Pass, Crystal City, and Carrizo 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, **including online magistrations.**
3. The local administrative judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judges and mayors and 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 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: **Train all employees on appropriate cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette. Screen all court employees and court attendees before coming into the court such as temperature checks with a thermometer and ask if they have known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19. In the case of an employee who was diagnosed with COVID-19, the individual may return to work when all three of the following criteria are met: at least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications); and the individual has improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared; or - In the case of an employee who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and does not get evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, the individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and the individual may not return to work until the individual has completed the same three-step criteria listed above; or - If the employee has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to work before completing the above self-isolation period, the individual must obtain a medical professional's note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis. Do not allow an employee with known close**

**contact to a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19 to return to work until the end of the 14-day self-quarantine period from the last date of exposure.**

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 required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. **Protective Measures: Employees must wash or sanitize their hands upon entering the facility. Employees must maintain at least 6 feet separation from other individuals. If such distancing is not feasible, other measures such as face covering, hand hygiene, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitation should be rigorously practiced. If an employer provides a meal for employees and/or jurors, employers are recommended to have the meal individually packed for each individual. Consistent with the actions taken by many facilities across the state, consider having all employees wear cloth face coverings (over the nose and mouth). If available, employees should consider wearing non-medical grade face masks. In addition, regularly and frequently clean and disinfect any regularly touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, tables, chairs, and restrooms. Disinfect any items that come into contact with personnel/public. Make hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, soap and water, or similar disinfectant readily available to employees and public. Place readily visible signage at the facility to remind everyone of best hygiene practices. If more than 10 employees and court attendees present at one time, consider having an individual wholly or partially dedicated to ensuring the health protocols adopted by the facility are being successfully implemented and followed.**

### Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: **Courts in single judge buildings will coordinate scheduling to reduce occupancy in the courthouse to the lowest degree possible. Judges in counties and cities with multiple judges in a building must coordinate scheduling of any in-person proceedings to reduce the number of people in the courthouse at one 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 **court staff and SHOULD strictly adhere to all CDC guidelines, as well as all recommendations in this document.**

### **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 and the maximum capacity has been posted on each restroom door.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

### *Gallery*

5. 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.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

### *Well*

7. 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, the Bailiff, **or a staff member designated by the judge**, 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 attempt to enter the court building, the Bailiff, **or a staff member designated by the judge**, 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 a face mask (N-95, KN-95, surgical or cloth), medical gloves protective eyewear.**

### Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building 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 **every two hours**.
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.

### Other

The following are the minimum recommended health protocols for all office-based employees in Texas. These minimum health protocols are not a limit on the health protocols that individuals may adopt. Individuals are encouraged to adopt additional protocols consistent with their specific needs and circumstances to help protect the health and safety of all. The virus that causes COVID-19 can be spread to others by infected persons who have few or no symptoms. Even if an infected person is only mildly ill, the people they spread it to may become seriously ill or even die, especially if that person is 65 or older with pre-existing health conditions that place them at higher risk. Because of the hidden nature of this threat, everyone should rigorously follow the practices specified in these protocols. The virus that causes COVID-19 is still circulating in our community. We should continue

**to observe practices that protect everyone, including those who are most vulnerable. Please note, public health guidance cannot anticipate every unique situation. Individuals should stay informed and take actions based on common sense and wise judgment that will protect their health.**

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court buildings regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with Dr. Victoriano Valdez, the local health authority of Maverick County, and county judges and mayors, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court buildings covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Signed on this 5<sup>th</sup> day of June 2020.



Amado J. Abascal, III

Local Administrative Judge

## Notice

Please be advised that individuals who are in vulnerable populations may contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual to receive special accommodations while attending court.

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.