

Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)
Pandemic/Infections Disease Plan for
The City of Edinburg Municipal Court, Hidalgo County Judiciary

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the portion of the building housing the City of Edinburg 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 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 of Edinburg.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than September 28, 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: All Judges and Court Staff shall (1) wash their hands, (2) answer a brief questionnaire about their health; and (3) have their temperature taken upon each entry to the court area.
3. Judges and court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.5 degrees Fahrenheit, 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 building area 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 times.
5. Protective Measures: Plexiglass shields have been installed, face masks and gloves are available for use in addition to masks for all judges and court staff use.

Scheduling

The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building areas: All persons are set for hearings in groups of two every ten minutes as hearings are set with instructions that they call in or use Zoom to access their hearings. If a hearing must be held in-person, only one defendant, their attorney and one witness at a time may be present to keep their number of persons in the courtroom at five if possible and not more than ten in any event.

Vulnerable Populations

1. Individuals who are over 65 years of age 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, docket notices, and in other communications notifying individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as vulnerable individuals and receive accommodations. A notice with this information will be posted on the court's 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 being given the opportunity to participate by telephone or Zoom.

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 six (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.
3. Some public common areas, including breakrooms and snack rooms are closed to the public.

Gallery

4. The maximum number of persons permitted in each courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
5. The courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row in the court.

Well

1. 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 six (6) feet between each space.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the court lobby counter area of the building, outside of each courtroom lobby.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at the counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, and in the lobby.
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 City Marshal and 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 to the court building.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, City Marshal and staff will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the 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 face masks and disposable gloves.

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 areas accessible to the public will be disinfected no less than every four hours from Monday – Friday.
2. Courtrooms will be disinfected after every hearing and cleaned by building cleaning staff every weekday morning and afternoon.

3. Supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus have been given to staff for disinfecting.
4. All staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.


Other

1. All persons in the courtroom and lobby shall remain at least 6 feet apart.
2. Marking on the floors and on courtroom pews will enforce social distancing.
3. If needed, interpreters can dial in. Officers and inspectors will be allowed to video conference.

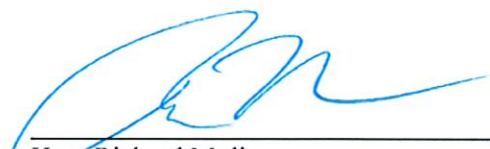
As additional information becomes available additional protective equipment may be provided and additional procedures may be implemented.

I have attempted to confer with all judges and court staff regarding this Operation Plan. In developing this plan, I have consulted with the Local Health Authority of Hidalgo County and the Mayor of the City of Edinburg, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of this municipal court covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with this plan.

Signed this 25th day of Sept., 2020.




Toribio "Terry" Palacios
Presiding Judge of Municipal Court

Approved: 

Hon. Richard Molina
Mayor of the City of Edinburg

Date: 9-24-20

Approved: 

Shawn Snider
Emergency Management Coordinator

Date: 9-24-2020

VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS POLICY

In light of the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, the Edinburg Municipal Court encourages all persons who have received and owe tickets to stay home and contact the Court by email at MUNICIPALCOURT@CITYOFEDINBURG.COM, or by phone at (956) 289-7797 from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. from Monday through Friday. If you are over 65 years of age or have a health condition that might cause you to be more vulnerable to the Coronavirus, like high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma or a compromised immune system caused by cancer, chemotherapy or another therapy, please contact the court to participate in your court hearing by telephone or teleconference. If you must visit the Court, you will be required to distance yourself from others by at least six feet. *PLEASE STAY HOME AND STAY SAFE.*

Debido al alto riesgo de contagio de COVID-19 (CORONA VIRUS), la Corte Municipal de Edinburg no quiere que usted corra ningun riesgo ofreciendole nuestros servicios via correo electronico o por telefono desde su hogar. Si usted ha recibido una infraccion de trafico, usted se puede poner en contacto con la Corte Municipal de Edinburg de las siguientes maneras: por correo electronico a MUNICIPALCOURT@CITYOFEDINBURG.COM o por telefono al numero (956) 289-7797 durante el horario de 8:00 a.m. a 5:00 p.m. de Lunes a Viernes. Si usted es mayor de 65 años de edad ó tiene las siguientes condiciones médicas como alta presión, enfermedad crónica de sus pulmones ó diabetes, problemas de obesidad, asma ó si su systema inmunológico es bajo por causa de cancer, quimoterapias o algún orto tipo de terapias, favor de contactar la Corte para asistirle por teléfono ó teleconferencia. La Corte estara disponible para ayudarle de al major manera posible para solucionar su infraccion de trafico. Sin embargo, si su situacion require visitar la Corte, usted debe mantener una distancia de seis pies entre cada persona que este a sus lado. *FAVOR DE MANTENERSE EN CASA Y MANTENGASE SALUDABLE LO MEJOR POSIBLE.*