

COVID-19 Operating Plan for Galveston Municipal Court

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the Galveston Municipal Court area, the Galveston 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.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Judges and court staff will undergo a health screening each time they enter the Justice Center.
2. Protective Measures:
 - Six feet of physical distancing should be maintained between both employees and members of the public;
 - There should be no shaking hands, hugging, or other social physical contact involving employees at work;
 - Employees are encouraged to frequently wash their hands and/or use hand sanitizer;
 - Where social distancing cannot be maintained all employees are required to wear masks or face coverings while at work;
 - Employees having physical contact with the public, within six feet, must wear masks or face coverings while interacting with the public;
 - Employees may not work on site if they are experiencing new or worsening symptoms of possible COVID-19, including cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, feeling feverish, have a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0°F, or have had known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19;
 - Any employee who does not report to or is asked to leave work due to the above restriction is required to seek testing or professional medical evaluation for COVID-19. The individual must obtain a medical professional's note clearing the individual to return based on an alternative diagnosis or qualify as recovered.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
A total of four (4) daily dockets, with a maximum of eight (8) court users per docket, will be coordinated to reduce occupancy in the court building. These dockets may be modified, as necessary.

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 being offered the option to reschedule or participate in court proceedings remotely by teleconferencing.

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.

Gallery

2. 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.
3. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Judge's Bench Area

4. In the courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, 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 outside of the courtroom. Soap dispensers are available inside of each restroom.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, and on the judge's bench.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations of the court building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the bailiff 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 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 greater than 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, gloves, and hand sanitizer.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will not be required to wear face coverings; recommended, but not required.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour may be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the court building, if the supply is available.

Cleaning

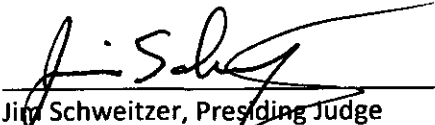
1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every five hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom 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

In consultation with the Galveston County Health District and the Galveston Mayor, this Plan is subject to modification as necessary to comply with best practices to ensure the health and safety of all individuals entering the Justice Center.

In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority, the mayor, and the presiding district judge, documentation of which is attached to this plan.

May 29, 2020
Date


Jim Schweitzer, Presiding Judge