

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Iowa Colony Municipal Court

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 **City of Iowa Colony 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. 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.
3. 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: the Court will take regular temperature checks and ensure that no staff member has any illness before participating in any in-person court proceedings.
2. 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.
3. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
4. Protective Measures: Face coverings, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant has been given to the staff and placed in the staff work areas. All work stations have been moved to meet the recommended social distancing guidelines. Maximum capacity signage has been placed throughout the staff area.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: The court will increase the number of dockets from 1 to 4 per month to minimize the number of defendants on each docket, and stagger times to reduce the courthouse capacity to the lowest degree possible at any given time. The court staff is also communicating with defendants by phone, encouraging the use of completing forms and payments on-line.

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 the court staff to establish an alternative, such as a phone conference, or private docket.

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.
3. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snack rooms, have been closed to the public.

Gallery

5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom is 25 and this has been posted in the court room, and lobby. 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. The chairs in the courtroom have been moved to provide

only 25 chairs for the public. The distance between each chair has been measured and are no less than six feet apart. Additionally, no individuals other than those on the docket will be allowed in the courtroom.

Well

7. In each 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 at the entrances to the building, and outside of each courtroom. Additionally, hand sanitizer dispensers will be available at the bench for individuals to use when digitally signing documents for court.
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. Additionally, tissues will be available at the bench for individuals to use when digitally signing documents for court.
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 courtroom, the court 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 courtroom.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the courtroom, the court 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 courtroom.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the courtroom will be provided personal protective equipment, including facial coverings, gloves, hand sanitizer and tissues, and will be educated by the City's Emergency Medical Services Director on the proper usage of personal protective equipment and on the screening instructions and guidelines.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the courtroom will be required to wear face coverings at all times.

Individuals have been notified by mail to bring face coverings with them. A defendant's case will be rescheduled if a face covering is not brought with them.

2. Court staff, judges and prosecutors will need a face covering as well.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every day.
2. Courtroom staff will clean the courtroom between every docket, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff and courtroom staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff and courtroom staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other

The City of Iowa Colony Municipal Court is housed in the City Council Chambers in City Hall; therefore, we have made the distinction between the Courtroom and the Court building.

I have conferred with all judge of the Iowa Colony Municipal Court regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and mayor, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 6/1/2020



Herman Atchison

Presiding Judge of Iowa Colony Municipal Court

I, Mayor Michael Byrum-Bratsen, approve the Operating Plan for the Iowa Colony Municipal Court.



Mayor Michael Byrum-Bratsen



VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

If you are over age 65, or have a serious underlying health condition, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, or have an immune system compromised by chemotherapy for cancer, or have another condition requiring therapy, please notify court staff at 281-369-2471 to discuss alternate accommodations.



Eleventh Administrative Judicial Region of Texas

**Susan Brown
Presiding Judge**