

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Manvel 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 court, the City of Manvel 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. Judges who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible and allowed by city policy. Court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. 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.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6^oF, 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 when they are in 6 feet or less proximity of others and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
5. Protective Measures: The Court has procured portable plexiglass/acrylic sneeze guards to be used in the courtroom by the court staff, Judges and prosecutor during all in-person court proceedings. Judges, prosecutor and court staff will be provided gloves and face coverings to wear during all in-person court proceedings, and will be socially distanced during in-person court proceedings from each other and with the public.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
After June 1, 2020, the Court will schedule in-person dockets with no more than 20 individuals allowed in the courtroom at a time.
Additionally, the Court will be conducting virtual/telephone conference court dockets to accommodate those that have capability to participate in virtual/telephone conference court dockets, are in the vulnerable population or who do not feel comfortable attending in-person court proceedings.
2. In order to further minimize the number of defendants in the courtroom at one time, the Judge will be seeing defendants as soon as they enter the courtroom.

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 provided the opportunity to appear for virtual/telephone conference court proceedings. If those individuals are not capable of appearing through virtual/telephone conference court, the Court will make other accommodations as necessary and possible.

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

4. 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.

5. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. The courtroom will only have 20 chairs for the public that measure no less than six feet apart. The public is not excluded from the courtroom; however, first priority will be given to those on the docket, parents of minors and attorneys.

Well

In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, 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, outside of each courtroom, and outside of restrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, and inside the restrooms.
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 courtroom, court staff or 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, court staff/bailiff if required 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 courtroom.
3. Inmates being transported from the jail to the courtroom 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. Court staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including face mask, gloves and 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. For those who have a condition that prevents them from wearing a face covering, alternative methods will be utilized in order for them to participate in court proceedings.
2. Individuals will be required 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 if requested.

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. Court 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 court staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff and court staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other

I have conferred with all judges 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: 09/08/2020




Presiding Judge of Municipal Court



Judge L. M. "Matt" Sebesta, Jr.

CITY OF MANVEL MUNICIPAL COURT

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Vulnerable individuals are those 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.

If you are part of this group please contact the court at (281) 489-1229 to speak to a court clerk regarding a special accommodation to ensure your continued safety.