

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the New Braunfels 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 courts of New Braunfels 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 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 and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Judge & staff will only be allowed in the building after 1) having their temperature checked & 2) responding to health screening questions.
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: Hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, and viricide are all available to staff and use will be required at regular intervals in all personal and common spaces. The use of stanchions and "stand/sit here" stickers will be utilized to queue visitors and maintain social distancing. Options are available to handle cases by phone, email, mail, and a 24 hour drop box are being encouraged to reduce in-person dealings with court cases. Notices and website include these options available to handle cases. Courtroom will be equipped with clear, plastic shields in the Judge, clerk and prosecutor work stations.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
 - a. All defendants will be encouraged to schedule virtual hearings instead of in-person appearances.

Reviewed by Mayor Brockman: 5/27/2020

- b. Dockets maximums will be decreased to minimize "gathering".
- c. Defendants may not bring anyone with them to court.
- d. There will be a 10 person limit in the courtroom and in the Lobby; seating is "designated" to maintain social distancing. Defendants will be asked to remain in their cars and staff will text them when they may enter the building.
- e. For those individuals who do not have a mask or who do not wish to enter the courtroom, we will provide a kiosk in the main city hall where they may participate in a virtual court hearing with the Judge. Individuals without computers or a smart phone may also use the kiosk.

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. Alternative accommodations are posted on the court's website and in conspicuous locations around the court building, and these accommodations are made available to all court visitors (a copy of which is attached).
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by allowing them to attend court via Virtual Court. Alternatively, arrangements may also be made where we can have court by appointment for those who are in the vulnerable population. A court date by appointment will involve only the vulnerable individual to be in the courtroom along with limited staff members and the Judge.

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

1. 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.
2. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

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3. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, and balliff 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, a designated staff member 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, a designated staff member 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 court building.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including mask, gloves, and hand sanitizer.

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 morning and evening, between docket sessions and 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

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I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building 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: 5/27/2020



Presiding Judge of Municipal Court



MUNICIPAL COURT

9 am to 4 pm, Monday thru Friday

For your safety and that of others, you are encouraged to handle your court business in the following ways:

- *use the dropbox located to the left,**
- *email court@nbtexas.org (include a copy of your photo ID), or**
- *call 830 221 4180**
- *or via Virtual Court – an online option to your court hearing.**