

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of North Richland Hills, Tarrant County

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judge and other individuals entering the building housing the court, the court of **City of North Richland Hills** will implement the following protective measures:

General

1. The Judge 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 (minimum 6 feet), maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. The Judge 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 to adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. The Judge will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 24, 2020

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. The Judge and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. The Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: daily temperature monitoring, COVID screening questions and self-monitoring and reporting.
3. The Judge 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. The Judge and court staff will wear face coverings when required, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations.
5. Protective Measures: Bullet resistant protective windows for payment window clerks and installation of sneeze guards at all face to face transactions stations. Protective gloves, protective masks worn by Judge and Marshals, and facial coverings used by all other staff when required. Frequent hand washing/sanitizing, and routine deep sanitizing of our facility. Front lobby has been marked with maximum limit signage and floor stickers for social distancing requirements. Disposable masks, hand sanitizer and wipes available for all visitors in the lobby and courtroom entrance. Any pen used for transactions will be sanitized and/or disposed of. Multiple options to limit the number of in-person transactions are available such as, virtual court hearings, email or fax requests and phone calls.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
The majority of processing cases can be handled electronically and we will utilize Virtual Court hearings using the Zoom platform for weekly proceedings excluding Jury Trials. Distribute options by text, email, and phone campaigns to encourage the scheduling of a Zoom hearing. Notices and fillable request forms for virtual hearings will be available on our website. Court date settings will be limited to

maximum capacity of our courtroom and overflow waiting room. Our front entry will be monitored and if at any time we reach capacity in the lobby, defendants will be directed to return to their vehicle to await instructions. Once we are able to reduce our capacity defendants will be contacted to return to the lobby to proceed with their case. Defendants will be limited to one guest to accompany them and at this time, guests under the age of 16 will not be allowed in the courtroom. To reduce physical contact during security screening, all who enter the courtroom will be asked to minimize and/or refrain from bringing in personal belongings such as purses and backpacks. Accommodations will be made to comply with the Open Courts provision, but at no time will the courtroom capacity exceed social distancing requirements.

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, docket 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 remote hearings where possible, individual hearings when necessary.

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. No more than two individuals will be permitted in an elevator.
3. 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.

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.

Well

6. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, clerk, court reporter, and bailiff areas 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 entrance to the building, outside of elevators, courtroom and bathroom areas.

2. Tissues have been placed in various locations throughout the courtroom (i.e. counsel tables, judges' bench etc.).
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 assigned Marshal 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. 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.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including protective facial masks and gloves.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the secured court area 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.

Cleaning

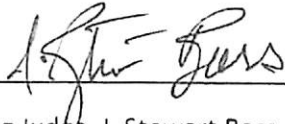
1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned multiple times throughout the day.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other

Remote hearings via ZOOM teleconferencing will be strongly encouraged for all persons having business before the court. The court will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and adjust accordingly with the advisement of local health authorities and State mandates.

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: 6/3/2020

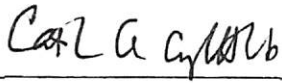


Presiding Judge, J. Stewart Bass,

6-3-20

Date

Reviewed and approved by:



Tarrant County Health Director, Dr. Colquitt

6/5/2020

Date



Mayor, Oscar Trevino

6/22/2020

Date



Eighth Region Administrative Judge, Honorable David Evans

6/22/2020

Date

COVID-19 NOTICE

North Richland Hills Municipal Court

You will be required to wear a face covering in all secured areas of the Court. If you do not have one, we will provide one for you.

If you 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 you will not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice.

Alternative arrangements are available for individuals who have a serious underlying health condition, compromised immune system and/or are over the age of 65. You may contact the Court at 817-427-6700 or by e-mail at nrhcourt@nrhtx.com.