

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Odem Municipal Court City Judiciary

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 **Odem 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 **July 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: **Temperatures taken of all city staff, Judge, and Prosecutor entering the building for the day.**
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: **Signs posted on front door – face covering required to enter and must remain on while in court building covering both nose and mouth. Persons will be seen by appointment only. Temperature of individual will be taken by court staff at time of entry and confirm ask 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. Social distancing signs are posted on front of building and floor has been marked to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet. Court staff are provided with gloves, masks, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes for work stations/counters. Hand sanitizer stand is located at the entrance door for customers. Courtesy notice mailed to defendant includes information with options to resolve violations by mail, fax, drop box, or pay on line to help avoid in person appearance. This information is also posted on city website.**

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
Court appearances will be appointment only, allowing 30 minutes each, Tuesday through Thursday between 1pm – 5pm. Defendant will be instructed to contact the court when they have arrived. Court staff will ask 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, if yes to any defendant will be informed they will get scheduled for another date and time, if no they will be asked to wait in vehicle and will be notified when they are to come inside. Defendants will not be allowed to bring other persons with them unless they are a juvenile then one parent or legal guardian will be allowed. Jury and bench trials rescheduled until further notice.

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. 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' website and in conspicuous locations around the court building. **"COVID19 Notice: Please contact the court to make other arrangements for a hearing if you are over age 65 or have 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."**
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by **being first person scheduled on the docket of each court appearance day.**

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 snackrooms, 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.

Well

5. 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 entrance to the building, outside of the courtroom, and outside of bathroom.
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 hallway.
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, **designated staff/clerk** 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, **designated staff/clerk** 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. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including **face masks, gloves, 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 once every hour and as needed.
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 :

Remote Pre trials via ZOOM to avoid city staff and defendants meeting in small areas. Glass divider at the judge's bench dividing Judge from defendant. A door leads defendant from outside directly to courtroom to avoid small lobby area. Everyone else will be required to wait in their vehicle and will be contacted by phone when they are to come in to see the Judge.

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: 10/12/2020

Y. Guerrero - Yolanda P. Guerrero

Presiding Judge of Municipal Court

Billy Huerta - Billy Huerta (MAYOR)