

Misc. Docket No. 2021-01

IN THE DISTRICT COURT  
PARMER COUNTY, TEXAS  
287<sup>TH</sup> JUDICIAL DISTRICT

## **Modified COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Parmer County 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 Parmer County 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 County Judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and the District Judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than January 21, 2021

### **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: Judges and staff will check temperatures daily before reporting to the courthouse. Additionally, they will use hand sanitizer upon entering and exiting the building and as necessary throughout 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 courthouse and should seek medical advice. Additionally, anyone awaiting results of a COVID-19 test or anyone having known close contact with someone awaiting results of a COVID-19 test will not be permitted to enter the courthouse.
4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
5. Protective Measures: See attached Parmer County Policy.

## **Scheduling**

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: District Court and County Court will have court hearings on a rotating schedule beginning January 21, 2021. Additional court dates will be added to reduce docket size and the number of participants.

## **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 Parmer County Courthouse Webpage 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 limiting participants as much as possible in cases involving those who are vulnerable, as well as by allowing reset of their cases if necessary, and by allowing communication by phone, mail, email, or fax.

## **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 meeting 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. Seating is limited to every other row.

### *Well*

6. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, 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, the exit to the courthouse, outside of the 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 bailiff will ask the individuals if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or have any known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Additionally, they will be asked if they are awaiting results of a COVID-19 test or if they have had close contact with anyone awaiting results of a COVID-19 test
2. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, a bailiff will determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
4. 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.
5. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including masks and gloves.

## **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times. [However, a staff member in their own workspace or office and separated from others by at least six feet can remove their masks while working at their desks. Staff members should replace their face coverings when walking about the building.]
2. All individuals entering the Courtroom will be required to wear face coverings at all times.
3. 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.
4. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided masks and encouraged to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.
5. Individuals who fall in the vulnerable population will be provided N-95 masks or a similar equivalent if the supply is available.

## Cleaning

1. Court staff will clean the common areas of the courtroom so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 4 hours on scheduled court days.
2. Court staff will clean the courtrooms between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court 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.

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 county judge, 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: 1/21/2021

*s/ Gordon H. Green*

Gordon H. Green,  
Local Administrative District Judge

287<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT COURT – DISTRICT CLERK - (806) 481-3419

PARMER COUNTY COURT – COUNTY CLERK - (806) 481-3691

**NOTICE TO VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS**

NOTICE – ANY PERSON WHO HAS BEEN DEEMED TO BE A VULNERABLE INDIVIDUAL AS DEFINED BELOW SHALL CONTACT THE COURT AT LEAST 48 HOURS PRIOR TO ANY APPEARANCE DATE AND/OR HEARING DATE AT THE OFFICIAL COURT TELEPHONE NUMBER LISTED ABOVE TO REQUEST TO HAVE THEIR IN-PERSON APPEARANCE WAIVED AND TO HAVE THEIR APPEARANCE BE SCHEDULED ELECTRONICALLY OR AT A LATER DATE. IF YOU WISH TO ENTER THE COURTHOUSE YOU WILL BE PROVIDED AN N95 MASK, OR SIMILAR EQUIVALENT FOR YOUR PROTECTION.

\*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 therapy.

## **Parmer County COVID-19 Policy**

These are the new guidelines going into effect for all County Departments on January 21, 2021.

- 1) All employees will be screened prior to coming into any county building to work for their daily shift. We are still awaiting arrival of digital thermometers to provide to every department, so until then employees are being asked to take their temperatures prior to arriving at work. Anyone with symptoms, awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test, or with any known close contact to a person who has been confirmed to have COVID-19 or with someone awaiting results of COVID-19 test, is not to come to work until speaking with their Department Head and receiving permission to return to work.
- 2) Employees will be expected to wash or sanitize their hands upon entering the building. New sanitization stations will be set up in multiple locations on or before January 21, 2021.
- 3) Employees will maintain at least six feet separation from other individuals. Where distancing is not feasible, face masks will be made available. Employees will be allowed to wear face masks at any time they choose; however, employees will be required to wear a mask if working conditions or activities (e.g., meetings and/or gatherings) make social distancing impossible or impractical. The County will order masks to have available for employees and for visitors to any county office. Additionally, N95 masks, or a similar equivalent, if available, will be provided to any employee who requests one, as well as for any member of the vulnerable population who visits the courthouse.
- 4) Any food that is provided to employees is recommended to be individually packaged to prevent any potential cross contamination. Keep in mind that things like kolaches, donuts, and desserts are often not separately packaged.

Please do your best to continue practicing social distancing and good hygiene practices. The Courthouse maintenance and custodial department will continue regularly scheduled cleaning and sanitizing of all common areas and offices in the Courthouse.