

# COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Denton County Judiciary

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, witnesses, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the courts of **Denton 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 local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and the county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary for conditions in the county.
4. Judges will begin setting nonessential 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. Judges and court staff monitoring requirements: Judges and court staff shall self-monitor body temperature and signs or symptoms of COVID-19 before reporting to work. If a judge or staff member feels ill, or has any symptoms of COVID-19, he or she shall stay at home. A judge or staff member may also take his or her temperature upon entrance to the courthouse located at 1450 E. McKinney Street, Denton, Texas or at the District Court Administration Offices located on the third floor of that building. Both locations shall be equipped with thermometers for employee use. Judge McCary may designate temperature check locations at the Juvenile Courts Building, and each Justice of the Peace may designate a temperature check location for the respective Justice Court Building.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0° F, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19, such as 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 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 encouraged to wear face coverings where social distancing cannot be achieved. Judges may also require, in his or her discretion, the wearing of protective masks (or other protective measures) in the courtroom and shall practice social distancing and appropriate hygiene as recommended by the Denton County Public Health Department.

5. Protective Measures: The Courts shall utilize, to the extent possible, and be subject to the guidelines contained herein, the following protective measures for the staff and public: wearing of surgical masks (or equivalent), frequent handwashing or sanitizing, social distancing of six (6) feet or more, Plexiglas shields between employees and the public, wearing of latex (or equivalent) gloves, door wedges, frequent cleaning and sanitizing of public areas and distance or seating markers.

### Scheduling

1. The following court policies are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
  - Judges may require remote hearings for essential and nonessential matters;
  - Court Administrators, to the extent possible, shall stagger cases to limit the number of people in the courtroom;
  - In-person Announcement/Arrestment dockets, to the extent possible, shall be limited to attorneys and prose defendants, unless alternate locations are available wherein social distancing protocols can be followed;
  - Jury impanelment shall be conducted at an alternate county facility; to wit: Emergency Services Building, 3900 Morse Street, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, Denton, Texas, or a similarly configured location that provides for social distancing protocols. Said jury panels shall be summonsed on a more frequent basis to allow for smaller gatherings. County and District Court voir dire shall be conducted in the central jury room, or a similarly configured location that provides for social distancing protocols.

### 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 may 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, if at all possible, by rescheduling the matter or allowing remote access or being excused from jury duty, as applicable.

### 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 six (6) feet.
2. No more than two individuals, not from the same household, will be permitted in an elevator. If more than one individual from the same household is in an elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the 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.
4. Public common areas, including break rooms and snack rooms, have been closed to the public.

#### *Gallery*

5. 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.
6. Seating shall be limited to comply with social distancing protocols and shall be limited to every other row if social distancing cannot be maintained using every row.

#### *Well*

7. 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 six (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. Tissue and trash cans 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 Services "Stop the Spread of Germs" flyer has been posted in multiple locations on each floor of the court building.

#### **Screening**

1. Signs will be posted at the entrances to the court buildings stating: "If you have a fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19, DO NOT ENTER the court building." Signs will be in English and Spanish.
2. An infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual will be available for self-screening at the entrance to the courts building located at 1450 E. McKinney Street, Denton, Texas. The use of said thermometer will be encouraged but not required.
3. 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 100.0° F will not be transported to the court building.

#### **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the court building will be encouraged 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 ~~are to be~~ required to be in the court building for over one hour will be provided surgical masks and encouraged 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 two times per day.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms at least one time during the business day 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.

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: 5/26/2020



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Local Administrative District Judge

## Notice to 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. If you are included in the vulnerable population, as described above, please contact the Court Administrator for the court you are scheduled to appear in. If you cannot locate the number for the specific court, please contact District Court Administration at (940) 349-2300 or (940) 349-2303. If you cannot locate the number for the specific county court, please contact County Court Administration at (940) 349-2100. **If you are scheduled for jury duty**, please contact jury services at the following numbers: (940) 349-2230, (972) 434-8830, or (940) 349-2231 (Fax).
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated, if at all possible, by rescheduling the matter or allowing remote access, or excusing from jury duty, as applicable.



*Leading our communities to a healthier future.*

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May 26, 2020

The Honorable Brody Shanklin  
211th Judicial District Court Judge  
Denton County Courts Building  
1450 East McKinney Street, 4th Floor  
Denton, TX 76209-4524

Dear Judge Shanklin,

I have reviewed the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Denton County Judiciary and hereby approve the plan as required.

Please call or email with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Matt Richardson, DrPH, MPH, FACHE

Director



Andy Eads  
Denton County Judge

May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I have reviewed the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Denton County Judiciary and hereby approve of the same.

Please feel free to reach out should you need anything further.

Sincerely,

Andy Eads  
Denton County Judge  
110 W. Hickory St., 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Denton, TX 76201  
940-349-2820