

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Erath County Judiciary Pursuant to the Thirty-Sixth Emergency Order of the Supreme 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 **Erath 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 physical distancing, maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. Judges may use reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely, subject to constitutional limitations.
3. The local administrative district judge will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the county.
4. Judges may begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings immediately.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judge and court staff monitoring requirements shall be determined by the local administrative judge.
2. 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 may not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice.
3. The courts shall publish schedules which are established to reduce occupancy in court buildings.

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.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated on a case by case basis.

Physical Distancing

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain adequate physical distancing of at least 3 feet.
2. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
3. 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 physical distancing of at least 3 feet between each space.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at multiple places throughout court buildings.
2. 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, court security officers may 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 may 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 may have their temperature taken prior to transport. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 99.6°F may not be transported to the court building.

Face Coverings

1. Face coverings are recommended but not required.
2. Individuals will be allowed to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask may be provided 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 4 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff shall be provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff shall be trained on proper clearing techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Jury Proceedings

1. In-person jury proceedings must be approved by the local administrative judge.
2. In-person jury proceedings must follow all established minimum standard health protocols approved by the local administrative judge.
3. Judges must consider on the record any objection or motion related to continuing with the jury proceeding at least seven days before the jury proceeding or as soon as practicable if the objection or motion is made or filed within seven days of the jury proceeding.
4. Judges shall establish communication protocol to ensure that no court participants have tested positive for COVID-19 within the previous 10 days, have had symptoms of COVID-19 with the previous 10 days, or have had recent exposure to COVID-19 within the previous 14 days.
5. Judges must include with the jury summons a COVID-19 questionnaire to be submitted in advance of jury selection that elicits from prospective jurors information about their exposure or particular vulnerability to COVID-19.
6. Judges must, upon request by a prospective juror, excuse or reschedule any prospective juror who provides information confirming their COVID-19 infection or exposure or their particular vulnerability to COVID-19.

Date: 3/17/21



Local Administrative District Judge