COVID-19 Operating Plan
Collin County Court System

Effective Date: June 8, 2020

Table of Contents

Courthouse Facilities Controlled by Collin County 3
Collin County District Courts, County Courts at Law, and Justice Courts 5
Collin County Magistrate Court 8

I have attempted to confer with all judges regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and county judge, documentation of which is described below. The judges of courts covered by this Operating Plan have agreed to conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 6/5/2020

/s/ Judge Emily Miskel
Local Administrative District Judge

Conferences between Local Administrative Judges, County Judge, and County Health Authority

On May 27, 2020, at 12:00 p.m., a video conference call was held, and the following persons were among those in attendance:

- Collin County Health Authority
  - Dr. Arifa Nishat, M.D.
  - Dr. Sadia Siddiqui, M.D.
  - Candy Blair, R.N.
- Collin County Judge
  - Chris Hill
- Local Administrative District Judge
  - Emily Miskel
- Local Administrative County Court at Law Judge
  - Corinne Mason

We consulted about:

- the terms of the Supreme Court of Texas *Seventeenth Emergency Order Regarding the Covid-19 State of Disaster* issued May 26, 2020
- the requirements set forth by the Office of Court Administration's *Guidance for All Court Proceedings During COVID-19 Pandemic* issued on May 4, 2020, and
- the development of a written operating plan for the courts.

On May 29, 2020, at 3:00 p.m., a second meeting was held at the Collin County Courthouse, and the following persons were among those in attendance:

- County Judge Chris Hill
- Sheriff Jim Skinner
- Judge Emily Miskel, Local Administrative District Judge
- Judge Corinne Mason, Local Administrative County Court at Law Judge
- Judge Chuck Ruckel, Justice of the Peace

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Courthouse Facilities Controlled by Collin County

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, Collin County will provide and recommend the following protective measures:

Social Distancing

1. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people practice social distancing, also called physical distancing, which means staying at least 6 feet away from other people outside of your home.[1]
2. The County encourages all persons to practice social distancing within the courthouse, including in elevators, restrooms, breakrooms, hallways, and the cafeteria.

Hygiene

3. The CDC recommends that people wash their hands often with soap and water. When soap and water are not available, the CDC recommends using a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.[2]
4. The County will place hand sanitizer dispensers at the entrances to the building and inside all public restrooms.
5. The County will post the Texas Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" in multiple locations inside the courthouse.

Screening

6. The CDC recommends that people monitor their health for symptoms of COVID-19 and take their temperature if symptoms develop.[3]
7. If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have COVID-19, the CDC recommends that you stay home except to get medical care and separate yourself from other people.[4]
8. The County will provide a screening station at the entrance to the courthouse to assist visitors in monitoring their health for symptoms of COVID-19.
9. County staff at the screening stations will offer to ask visitors if they are feeling feverish; have experienced a recent loss of smell or taste; 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.
10. County staff at the screening stations will offer to take visitors' temperature using a handheld infrared thermometer.
11. Individuals who register a temperature equaling or exceeding 100.0ºF, and individuals who answer "yes" to any of the screening questions will be discouraged from entering the courthouse.

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[1] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html
[2] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html
[3] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html
[4] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html

12. The County will provide personal protective equipment, including hand sanitizer and masks, to screening staff.

Face Coverings

13. The CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.[5]
14. The county will make disposable masks available for all visitors to the courthouse who choose to wear one.

Cleaning

15. The County will provide cleaning staff who will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 24 hours.
16. The County will provide cleaning staff who will clean the courtrooms at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
17. The County will provide cleaning staff with cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
18. The County will provide court staff with cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
19. The County will recommend cleaning staff have training on proper cleaning techniques and appropriate personal protective equipment.

County Judge Chris Hill

[5] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Collin County District Courts, County Courts at Law, and Justice Courts

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 Collin County District Courts, County Courts at Law, and Justice Courts 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 county 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 June 1, 2020

Judge and Court Staff Health

5. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
6. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Judges and court staff will individually monitor their health and will report any changes as necessary. Staff will follow Collin County Human Resources policies about reporting to work, staying home from work, and paid/unpaid leave.
7. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0^{o}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.
8. Judges and court staff will practice appropriate hygiene recommendations in the courtroom, which may include one or more of the following: wearing face coverings, practicing social distancing, and/or having Plexiglas dividers installed.
9. Protective Measures: Gloves will be available to bailiffs for direct contact with members of the public.

Scheduling

10. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: The courts who share courthouse facilities have approved a rotating schedule for in-person proceedings.

Vulnerable Populations

11. 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.
12. Each judge will include information on orders setting in-person 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' websites and in conspicuous locations around the court building.
13. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for in-person court proceedings will be accommodated by remote appearance or other procedures determined by the court on a case-by-case basis.

Social Distancing

14. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the courtroom will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.

Gallery

15. 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.
16. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating will be staggered to promote social distancing.

Well

17. 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, where possible.
18. Plexiglas barriers will be installed in appropriate places in the courtroom.

Hygiene

19. Hand sanitizer will be available in each courtroom.
20. 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.

Screening

21. We will request that the Sheriff ensure that 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. We will request that the Sheriff ensure that inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 100.0^{o}F will not be transported to the court building.

Face Coverings

22. We will require all individuals in the courtroom to wear face coverings at all times, except on specific findings by the court as necessary on an individualized basis.

Cleaning

23. The courtroom will provide paper towels and sanitizer, and each court participant will be required to wipe down their own work area before and after each proceeding.

Other

The judges understand that we may be unable to hold in-person proceedings if the county's courthouse facilities are not in compliance with Texas Supreme Court orders, OCA requirements, and this plan.

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Collin County Magistrate Court

Motions Docket

- Hearings are essential, most involving family violence and will be initially set in live court since it is impracticable in many of these cases with unrepresented parties to hold them completely remotely.
- Individuals will see a sign at the door reminding them to wear a mask and remain six feet apart prior to entering the courtroom.
- Masks will be provided for individuals entering the courtroom who do not have a mask.
- Upon entering the courtroom, the bailiff will make sure that individuals who are not together are spaced at least six feet apart.
- People who are not necessary for the hearings will be asked to remain outside the courtroom.
- Ten people will be permitted in the courtroom at one time, the rest will be ordered to remain outside in the hallway until ordered into the courtroom by the bailiff.
- Parties, when notified of the court date will be advised to notify the court if they are a vulnerable person, live with a vulnerable person, or are a caregiver for a vulnerable person requiring accomodations. (Vulnerable person is someone over age 65, 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).
- Vulnerable individuals or those who are in regular contact with vulnerable persons will be afforded an opportunity to appear by video.

Examining Trial Docket

- Individuals will see a sign at the door reminding them to wear a mask and remain six feet apart prior to entering the courtroom.
- Masks will be provided for individuals entering the courtroom who do not have a mask.
- Upon entering the courtroom, the bailiff will make sure that individuals who are not together are spaced at least six feet apart.
- People who are not necessary for the hearing will be asked to remain outside the courtroom.
- Ten people will be permitted in the courtroom at one time, the rest will be ordered to remain outside in the hallway until ordered into the courtroom by the bailiff.
- Examining trials require the presence of inmates, making it difficult to conduct hearings remotely so they will be set as live hearings.

- Accommodations in the form of a remote video hearing will be available where an individual involved in the hearing is vulnerable or in regular contact with a vulnerable individual upon request of the party.

Arraignment Docket

- Docket is held twice daily in the jail courtroom, with the judge arraigning inmates remotely with video-conferencing equipment.
- Inmates will continue to be spaced six feet apart in the jail courtroom as they have been since the pandemic.
- Inmates are all provided masks when they arrive at the jail. Inmates, clerks, and the detention officers will continue to use masks during arraignments. All jail employees have had their temperature taken prior to entering the jail. All inmates have had their temperature taken and have been screened prior to being allowed in the courtroom.
- Inmates who are potentially contagious or have potentially been exposed to covid-19 will continue to be arraigned separately in the infirmary or in isolation cells, as determined by the Collin County Sheriff's Office protocol and the medical staff working in the jail. Inmates in the infirmary have masks and magistrates in the jail have N-95 masks and gloves to use in the infirmary.