

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Hemphill, Lipscomb, Roberts, and Wheeler Counties 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 Hemphill, Lipscomb, Roberts, and Wheeler Counties 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 July 1, 2020.
5. The protective measures implemented in this COVID-19 Operating Plan are in full force and effect on any day that the 31st Judicial District Court, County Court, or County Justice Court conduct an in-person proceeding. On all other days, those protective measures implemented in County's Public Access to County Offices shall be in full force and effect. A member of the courthouse staff shall post notice of the applicable plan at the entrances of the building.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely should telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Staff will self-monitor by checking temperature upon arrival at the courthouse. Staff will be required to wear face coverings when not in their own private workspace or office, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to 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, nausea, vomiting, and joint pain 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.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: No more than one (1) case will be heard at a time in the courtroom. Attorneys, litigants, witnesses, and any other participants will only be allowed into the courthouse/courtroom

when their case is actively being heard by the Court. Parties shall communicate with the Court's coordinator and bailiff in determining when to enter the courthouse/courtroom.

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 (a copy of which is attached).
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by appearing via the Zoom application or other remote means.

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. Public common areas are closed to the public.

Gallery

3. 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.
4. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

Well

5. 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 entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, outside of each 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 member of the courthouse staff will ask the individuals if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, or

difficulty breathing; joint pain; muscle aches, chills, sore throat, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 and follow up with a written questionnaire in English and Spanish which will be required upon entering the courthouse. 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, a member of the courthouse staff 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. 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.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves and face coverings.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times other than when giving testimony.
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.

Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned 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 will clean the witness stand between witnesses.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
5. 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: July 23, 2020



Honorable Steven R. Emmert
31st District Judge
Local Administrative Judge for
Hemphill, Lipscomb, Roberts, and
Wheeler Counties