

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Uvalde County Judiciary

Effective March 22, 2021

In accordance with the Texas Supreme Court's 36th Emergency Order Regarding the COVID-19 State of Disaster, and 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 **Uvalde County** will implement the following minimum 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 and the local administrative district judge will continue to use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely. They will also consider conducting hybrid hearings when advisable.
3. The Local Administrative District Judge will consult with the Local Health Authority and the County Judge regarding this operating plan as necessary taking into consideration the COVID-19 conditions within the county.
4. Judges may set in person proceedings starting March 22, 2021 under the conditions set out below, but are encouraged and advised to continue to conduct hearings remotely whenever possible.

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: All Judges and Court staff will self-monitor. Those with any of the symptoms listed in number 3 below will stay home, call in and not report to work.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100°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 stay home, call in and not report to work.
4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings when dealing with the public, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
5. Protective Measures: Face coverings and hand sanitizer will be provided to each court employee.

Scheduling and Screening

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Court schedules will be coordinated so that no more than one in person hearing/docket will take place on any floor at any time. All in person hearings/dockets will comply with the Social Distancing requirements set forth under the heading Social Distancing below. All in person hearings/dockets will be spaced adequately to allow for proper cleaning between each hearing.
2. All hearing/docket participants will be screened prior to entry to the courtroom. If they report and provide documentation of the following: testing positive for COVID-19 within the previous 10 days, having symptoms of COVID-19 within the previous 10 days, or have had exposure to COVID-19 within the previous 14 days, they will not be allowed to enter the building. The hearing will be reset or accommodations will be made to allow the person to participate remotely. Should the individual exhibit any of the following: fever, 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 they will not be permitted to enter the building and be advised to seek medical attention. The hearing will be reset or accommodations will be made to allow the person to participate remotely.

Staff who are screening individuals entering the courtroom will be provided personal protective equipment, including infrared thermometers, face coverings, gloves and hand sanitizer.

3. All judges will include with notices of court settings information for **vulnerable individuals** or those who live with or are caregivers for vulnerable individuals setting out how those individuals can request accommodations to reduce the appearance of those individuals at the courthouse.

Vulnerable Populations include 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 such therapy.

All judges will include with notices of court settings information requiring participants to contact the court prior to the court setting and advise the court and provide documentation of the following:

1. Any positive test for COVID-19 within 10 days prior to the court setting;
2. Any symptoms of COVID-19 within 10 days prior to the court setting;

3. Any known or recent exposure to COVID-19 within 14 days prior to the court setting.

Upon receipt of documentation of the above, the Court shall reset the hearing or make accommodations to allow the participant to participate remotely.

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°F will not be transported to the court building and arrangements will be made for them to participate remotely.

No jury trials will be conducted prior to June 1, 2021 without a written jury plan in place that has been approved by the Local Administrative Judge (38th Judicial District Judge).

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 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 being given the opportunity to participate remotely via Zoom videoconference if they are a witness or a party, or being excused from jury service upon proof of age or underlying health condition if they are a potential juror. All persons who have business at the courthouse with offices other than court offices will receive special accommodations on a case by case basis upon notice to the office in question.
4. All Courthouse Staff who are members of a vulnerable population shall be provided with masks, goggles or protective eye shields or plastic barriers upon request.

Social Distancing

1. 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

2. 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.

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

Well

4. 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.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the courtroom will be required 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. All individuals participating in any court proceeding will be required to wear a face covering at all times except when speaking or testifying in a court proceeding. If any court participant does not have a face covering, one will be provided to them.

Date: 3/19/2021

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carmel D.D.", is written over a horizontal line.

Local Administrative District Judge