

COVID-19 OPERATING PLAN FOR IN PERSON COURT PROCEEDINGS FOR JUDICIARY IN JASPER, NEWTON, SABINE & SAN AUGUSTINE COUNTIES

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the court buildings for in-person hearings within the courts of JASPER, NEWTON, SABINE and SAN AUGUSTINE counties, the following protective measures are hereby implemented:

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 judge shall maintain regular communication with each county judge, and each respective county judge will maintain regular communication with their local health authority in order to adjust this operating plan as necessary with existing conditions in each respective county.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than July 1, 2020.

Judges, Attorneys and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely may telework when possible.
2. Judges, Attorneys and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements:
 - a. Prior to any in-person court proceeding, all judges, attorneys and court staff will be required to be screened with temperature checks and a medical/travel/exposure screening form upon entry into courtroom and/or court offices. A thermometer and screening forms will be provided by the county for each department.
3. Any judge, attorney 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 will not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice.

4. Judges, attorneys and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, if practical, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times.
5. Protective Measures: Strict handwashing and sanitizing of all surfaces and materials used in the offices and courtroom will be maintained. The use of hand sanitizer and/or washing of hands should be done immediately upon entering the building.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:
 - a. Each court will stagger the times of all hearings in order to maintain social distancing requirements and avoid more than 10 persons gathered in the courtroom or in areas around the courtroom.
 - b. Court dockets will be reduced in size and scheduled appropriately to comply with social distancing and courtroom occupancy requirements.
 - c. All jail cases will be done remotely when possible to comply with social distancing and courtroom occupancy requirements.
 - d. All litigants seeking the court's services should schedule an appointment whenever possible.

Vulnerable Populations

1. Individuals who are over age 65, individuals with serious underlying health conditions, individuals with a compromised immune system and individuals who are pregnant 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 an in-person court proceedings will be accommodated by the option to participate remotely.

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. 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 breakrooms 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. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other 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 6 feet between each space.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers, if available, 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, if available, 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.

Litigants and Witnesses Screening

1. When any individual attempts to enter the court building for an in-person court proceeding, the Security Checkpoint Officers will ask and/or require a screening form to determine if individuals 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 will be refused admittance to the court building.
2. When any individuals attempt to enter the court building for an in-person court proceeding, the Security Checkpoint Officers will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 99.6°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Transport officers and inmates being transported from the jail to the court building for an in-person court proceeding 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. Inmates cleared by the jail screening to enter the court building will be screened again upon entrance to the court building for an in-person court proceeding, as well as the transport officers.
5. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including face coverings and disposable gloves, if available.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building for in-person court hearings will be required to wear face coverings at all times, if practical.
2. Individuals attending in-person court proceeding 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 or face covering may be provided, if available.
3. All transport officers and inmates entering the court building for an in-person court proceeding are required to wear face coverings at all times.

Cleaning

1. When in-person court proceedings are underway, the Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every two to three hours.
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 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.

Operating Plan Guideline Admendments

All of the guidelines set forth herein for in court proceedings are subject to any changes by the Center for Disease Control, Office of Court Administration and the Supreme Court of Texas.

Other

Please watch the following video. It will help county employees and the public understand the daily screening and hygiene procedures:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5Z8oeSlrWg>

In developing the plan, I have consulted with each local health authority and each county judge within the 1st, 1-A and 273rd Judicial District Courts (Jasper, Newton, Sabine and San Augustine counties). I will ensure that all District Judges, CPS and AG Judges, and other courts covered by this Operating Plan are given a copy of this Plan and are aware of conducting in-person court proceedings consistent with the plan.

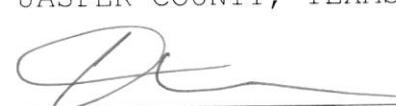
Date: 5/26, 2020.


CRAIG MIXSON
LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT JUDGE
1ST DISTRICT COURT JUDGE FOR
JASPER, NEWTON, SABINE and SAN
AUGUSTINE COUNTIES

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in all court buildings regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, as County Judge, I consulted with the local health authority. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court buildings covered by this Operating Plan are given a copy of this Plan and are aware of conducting in person court proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 5/26, 2020.


MARK ALLEN,
COUNTY JUDGE
JASPER COUNTY, TEXAS

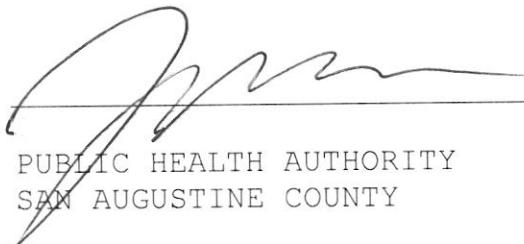

KENNETH WEEKS,
COUNTY JUDGE
NEWTON COUNTY, TEXAS


JEFF BOYD,
COUNTY JUDGE
SAN AUGUSTINE COUNTY, TEXAS


DARYL MELTON
COUNTY JUDGE
SABINE COUNTY, TEXAS

I have reviewed and approved this plan.


DR. SPENCER, M.D.
PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITY
JASPER, NEWTON and SABINE COUNTIES


PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITY
SAN AUGUSTINE COUNTY

I have reviewed and approve this plan.


BILLY TED SMITH
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR
JASPER, NEWTON and SABINE COUNTIES


EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR
SAN AUGUSTINE COUNTY