

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Armstrong County 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 court of Armstrong County, Texas, will implement the following protective measures:

General

1. All judges in the Armstrong County Courthouse 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 15, 2020

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: Judge and court staff will self-monitor for symptoms described in item 3 below.
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 Aches or Joint Pain
 - Headache
 - Sore Throat
 - Loss of Taste or Smell
 - Diarrhea
 - Nausea or Vomitingor having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 must not enter the building and should seek medical advice.
4. Judges and court staff shall endeavor to practice social distancing and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all times, particularly when interacting with each other and with the public. Judges and court staff shall be required to wear face coverings anytime the circumstances in the courtroom or the court building offices do not allow for compliance with social distancing guidelines.

Scheduling

1. The following actions concerning court schedules will be followed to reduce occupancy in the court building: The Courts of Armstrong County will work with each other to schedule any in-person hearings on separate dates to minimize the number of people entering the courtrooms on any given day and allow for appropriate cleaning between proceedings.

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. Any persons that fall within the vulnerable populations who are scheduled to appear in person for court will be accommodated by allowing them to appear by zoom or by phone. When necessary to make a personal appearance, a tablet or computer will be made available in the Court Library/Conference Room on the first floor of the court building that can be used for an appearance by zoom in the courtroom.

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 one person not from the same household will be permitted to ride on the courthouse elevator at the same time. Corresponding signs have been posted at the elevator on each floor.
3. No more than two persons not from the same household will be permitted in the courthouse restrooms at the same time. Corresponding signs have been posted on each restroom door.

Gallery

4. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined and posted. The balcony area of the courtroom will be closed until further notice. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by the judge and court staff.
5. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to designated rows that provide a minimum separation of 6 feet.

Well

6. 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 the courtroom, outside of bathrooms and in each office of the court building.
2. Tissues have been placed at the court building entrance, near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand and on the judge's bench.
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. Access to the Court building will be limited to one entrance with an exception for persons with disabilities that will not allow them to climb or descend stairs. A number will be posted for persons to use to contact the court building personnel to identify themselves as a person unable to access the main entrance so they can receive appropriate accommodations.
2. A sign will be posted at the court building entrance directing any person who is feeling feverish, or has experienced **new or worsening** signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as
 - Cough
 - Shortness of Breath or Difficulty Breathing
 - Chills
 - Repeated Shaking with Chills
 - Muscle Aches or Joint Pain
 - Headache
 - Sore Throat
 - Loss of Taste or Smell
 - Diarrhea
 - Nausea or Vomitingor has been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 to not enter the building. Such individuals will be directed to call the courthouse number so that alternate arrangements can be made to address the reason for their appearance at the courthouse.
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 any of the above symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 100°F will not be transported to the court building.

Face Coverings

1. A sign will be posted at the entrance to the court building directing all individuals entering the court building to wear face coverings at all times while in the presence of any unrelated person, including but not limited to, courthouse staff. The sign will inform visitors to the court building that they may be refused service by courthouse staff if not wearing a face covering.
2. A table containing an ample supply of surgical facemasks laid out for easy access (along with hand sanitizer and tissues) will be located at the entrance to the court building to assure that all individuals entering the court building can comply with Item 1, above.
3. Any Judge may exclude any person not wearing an appropriate face covering in an appropriate manner from courtroom proceedings.

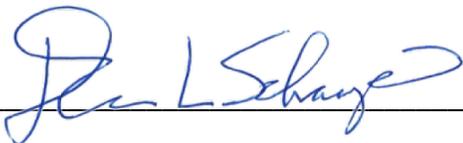
Cleaning

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 24 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff, or the Court staff, will clean the areas of the courtroom utilized by persons attending court 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 received training on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other

I have attempted to confer with all judges of Armstrong County that utilize the courtroom in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will encourage the judges that utilize the county courtroom and court building covered by this Operating Plan to conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 6/2/2020



Local Administrative District Judge