

Revised COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Sugar Land Municipal Court of Record

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the building housing the court, the Sugar Land Municipal Court of Record 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 presiding judge of the municipal court, through the court administrator, will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and the emergency operations staff of the City of Sugar Land and will adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. No in-person proceeding will be conducted by the court until further notice. All proceedings, including arraignments and pretrial hearings will be conducted virtually using the Zoom videoconferencing platform. In furtherance of this order the paperwork routinely provided by the court to the parties will be delivered digitally to the attorney for each party as necessary. Review of evidence by the defense will be done remotely as agreed with the attorney for the State of Texas. If for any reason, an attorney or other court participant is unable to participate in a pretrial hearing remotely, a hybrid process will be used to limit contact between court participants. Defendants and their attorneys will appear and check into court at the time directed. Upon arrival, the attorney will be directed to the second courtroom and all defendants will be instructed to remain in the lobby until summoned by their attorney into the second courtroom. Seating in the lobby will be arranged so as to permit proper social distancing for those waiting in the lobby, In the second court room, the attorney and their client will be able to view discovery products and discuss their case confidentially. Attorneys and defendants will be encouraged to maintain social distancing. Wearing of masks is required while in the court building. Masks will be provided upon request. Conversations between counsel and the prosecutor and appearances before the court for entry of pleas will be conducted using the Zoom videoconferencing platform from the second courtroom so that all participants in the proceeding are in separate locations while participating in the proceeding. Paperwork and payments will be handled at the court window.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Because of limitations imposed by court technology, judges and court staff are not able to perform the essential functions of their job remotely. Teleworking is therefore impossible. The court administrator, in consultation with human resources and city administration shall implement an employee work schedule that allows the courts essential functions to be

performed on a timely basis while minimizing exposure of staff to other members of staff and the public.

2. Judges and court staff shall be monitored daily upon entering the building by undergoing a temperature check upon entry.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0 degrees, 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 and court staff will be required to practice social distancing and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time. Masks should be worn when social distancing is not practical.
5. Meetings should be avoided. When a meeting must be held because its purpose cannot be accomplished by phone call or email, proper social distancing should be observed.
6. Protective Measures:
 - a. Hand sanitizer, tissue, and an appropriate waste receptacle will be provided at each work station, including those in individual offices, the courtroom, cubicles, and bullpen area.
 - b. Building services will regularly disinfect frequently contacted surfaces such as door handles, light switches, bathrooms, vending machines, public countertops, and water fountains according to the schedule set out by the director of building services.
 - c. Wipes and alcohol solution are available to the judge and court staff for regular use. Judge and court staff are expected to wipe down their work station at least two times a day, if not more often.

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. All notices setting hearings, docket notices, or other notices directing the appearances or requiring an action by any individual will include a notice that anyone experiencing upper respiratory symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath) should contact the court or visit the court website for options that do not require a court appearance and advise that motions of continuance can be delivered to the court by email.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by conducting the proceeding remotely, or if a remote proceeding cannot be accomplished, by resetting the matter. If a proceeding involving a member of a vulnerable population must be held in-person, all participants, including the member of the vulnerable population, all court staff, and all others in the courtroom during the proceeding will be required to wear masks.

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.

Gallery

2. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been set at 12. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff and court security personnel.
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, clerk, 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 has been placed at the entrances to the building, at counsel tables, and at each work station in the court room.
2. Tissues have been placed at counsel tables, on the benches in the gallery, and each work station in the court room.
3. The Department of State Health Service's "Stop the Spread of Germs Flyer" has been posted in multiple locations of the court building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, staff will ask the individuals if they 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 individuals attempt to enter the court building, staff will use a no-contact 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. All inmates will be seen by the judge in the jail facility after appropriate health screening by the Sugar Land Police Department. The judge will remain in the jail picket area separated from the inmate by the window.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment as determined by the local health authority.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times.
2. Face masks must be properly fitted to the face, and must cover mouth AND nose at all times.
3. In the event an accommodation for an in-person proceeding is requested by a member of a vulnerable population, all individuals in the courtroom during the proceeding will be required

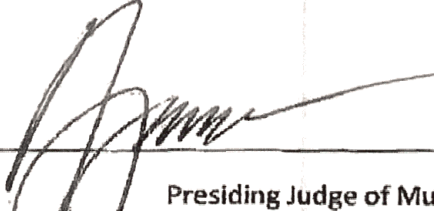
to wear a mask. If the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.

Cleaning

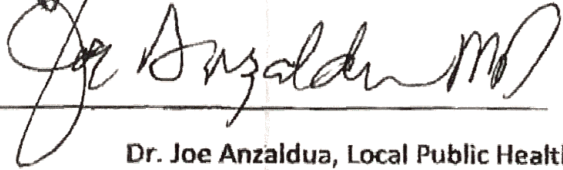
1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every four (4) hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the 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.

I am the only judge who regularly conducts proceedings in Sugar Land Municipal Court. I have provided copies of this plan to all other judges who might conduct proceedings in this court. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and city administration as well as the emergency response team and other departments sharing the building. Documentation of that consultation is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges conducting proceedings in the Sugar Land Municipal Court will conduct all proceedings consistent with the plan.

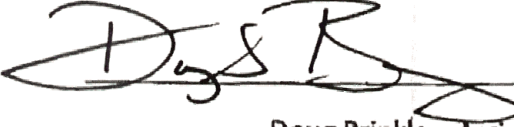
Date: 12/23/2020


12/23/2020

Presiding Judge of Municipal Court



Dr. Joe Anzaldua, Local Public Health Authority


12/28/20

Doug Brinkley, Assistant City Manager