

Minimum Standard Health Protocols for All Court Proceedings in Leon County, Texas

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the courtrooms of the courthouse in Leon County, the courts of Leon County 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 orders provided, and the minimum health protocols provided herein.
2. Judges can begin setting in-person proceedings immediately in all Leon County courts.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges shall discuss with Court Staff the need for self-monitoring and reporting of any COVID-19 symptoms. Judges and Court Staff will comply with the health protocols set out herein.
2. Judges 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.
3. During in-person hearings or dockets, Judges and Court Staff will be required to practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations. It is recommended that Judges and staff wear face coverings. Face coverings may be removed in areas protected by appropriate shielding or as necessary to communicate or when social distancing occurs. While in chambers and staff work areas common to the court's chambers, masks or face coverings are optional when social distancing occurs, but must be made available to those who wish to use them.

Court Scheduling

1. The Courts of Leon County may hold trials, hearings, in-person proceedings, or perform other judicial functions Monday through Friday of each week.
2. All Leon County Courts will establish individual court schedules in consultation with all Courts located in the same building in keeping with this plan.
3. Courtroom schedules currently employed by the District Courts and County Court will remain in place as they are adequate to ensure separation of individuals and reduce populations within the Leon County courthouse. In person individual court schedules shall be provided to the District Court Coordinator.
4. If the courtrooms available to the Justice of the Peace courts are not adequate to comply with social distancing, the Justice of the Peace may schedule use of the District or County Courtroom(s) on a day no District Court, County Court or ancillary court proceeding is occurring.

FILED
CASSANDRA NOEY, DISTRICT CLERK
LEON COUNTY, TEXAS

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BY Carol Johnson

Remote Participation

1. Upon request and good cause shown, Judges are allowed to permit any court participant other than a juror, to participate remotely in any proceeding, subject to constitutional limits.

Social Distancing

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the courtroom will be required to maintain adequate social distancing as directed by the court.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of each courtroom, and inside courtroom.

Face Coverings

1. When Court proceedings are occurring, all individuals entering the courtroom will be required to wear face coverings.
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. Face coverings may be removed as necessary to communicate, with the approval of the Court.
4. Upon approval of the court, face coverings may be removed when social distancing occurs.

Cleaning

1. When Court proceedings are occurring, Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Jury Proceedings

1. A court may conduct an in-person jury proceeding if:
 - a. to assist with coordination of local resources and to manage capacity issues, the court has obtained prior approval, including a prior approved schedule, for the jury proceeding from the local administrative district judge or presiding judge of the municipal courts, as applicable;
 - b. the court has considered on the record any objection or motion related to proceeding with the jury proceeding at least seven days before the jury proceeding or as soon as practicable if the objection or motion is made or filed within seven days of the jury proceeding;
 - c. the court has established communication protocols to ensure that no court participants have tested positive for COVID-19 within the previous 10 days, have had symptoms of COVID-19 within the previous 10 days, or have had recent known exposure to COVID-19 within the previous 14 days;
 - d. the court has included with the jury summons information on the precautions that have been taken to protect the health and safety of prospective jurors and a COVID-19 questionnaire to be submitted in advance of the jury selection that elicits from prospective jurors information about their exposure or particular vulnerability to COVID19; and

e. the court has excused or rescheduled prospective jurors who provide information confirming their COVID-19 infection or exposure, or their particular vulnerability to COVID-19 and request to be excused or rescheduled.

Other

1. Any of the trial courts of Leon County may take any other reasonable action necessary to avoid exposing court proceedings to the threat of COVID-19. **A judge may impose stricter health protocols in his or her court than those required by the adopted minimum standard health protocols set forth herein.**
2. Any of the trial courts of Leon County may consider as evidence sworn statements made out of court or sworn testimony given remotely, out of court, such as by teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other means.
3. Any of the trial courts of Leon County may conduct proceedings away from the court's usual location with reasonable notice and access to the participants and the public.

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in Leon County regarding these protocols and consulted with the local health authority.

Date: March 16, 2020



Deborah Oakes Evans
87th Judicial District Court
Leon County Local Administrative District Judge