



City of Lancaster

Guidelines for Safely Reopening Municipal Court

COVID-19 Operating Plan for the City of Lancaster, Dallas County Judiciary

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the municipal building housing the municipal court, the court of City of Lancaster 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 will maintain regular communication with the local health authority, county judge and mayor and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. Judges may begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 1, 2020

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: Temperature readings on all staff, bailiffs and Judge will be conducted at the time of entry in the building.
2. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 100.0°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. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time.
4. Employees are to disinfect workstations each morning before beginning work, and after lunch period. This includes keyboards and phones.

5. Employees are to practice good hand hygiene by washing hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds at a time. Handwashing is also important when returning to the worksite from outside meetings, lunch and breaks.
6. Protective Measures: Plexiglass shields have been installed at the clerk's counter to protect clerks assisting the public in the lobby. Plexiglass shield has been installed on Prosecutor's desk. Social distancing markers will be installed on the lobby floor, court room and on the sidewalk at the entrance to the building. Signs will be posted reminding the public to practice social distancing. Handsfree hand sanitizer is available in the lobby for the public as well as restrooms with soap and water.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Additional dockets have been added on court days to limit the number of scheduled appearances in increments of 1 hour of 9:00 am, 10:00 and 11:00 am. This will allow for smaller dockets and controlled entry in the courtroom by the bailiff. The Court will add another docket day on Wednesdays to keep in line with the occupancy load requirement in the Court building. All Attorney Plea dockets will be done by electronic mail, only Assault F/V cases will be in person hearings after June 1st, 2020 on the Attorney Plea docket.

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.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by entering the courtroom individually at the beginning of each docket and will be given information on how to dispose of cases without having to appear in court, which includes the ability to schedule a virtual hearing using Zoom. This information is posted on the court webpage and provided with this document as Attachment "A".

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. 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.

Gallery

3. 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 bailiff
4. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is marked on each bench for proper distancing. Bailiff will direct individuals which row to sit in, seating is limited to every other row, maximum of ten individuals at one time.

Well

5. 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. The prosecutor table has a shield of plexiglass installed of sufficient height and width to protect individuals during pre-trial communications.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed in the lobby and at each clerk's window.
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 of the court building.

Screening

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, the Bailiff 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, the Bailiff will take a temperature reading of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.0°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
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 symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 100.0°F will not be transported to the court building.
4. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including gloves and face coverings.

Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a face covering, the court will reset the hearing to allow the individual to appear with a face covering.

Cleaning

1. Court building staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned regularly. Court staff will supplement by using disinfectant spray in the courtroom, on surfaces, tables and benches between dockets.
2. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

In developing the plan, I consulted with the mayor, and Dallas County Health Department documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the staff at the Municipal Court covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 5/27/2020

 Henry Campbell
Presiding Judge of Municipal Court





Options to address cases without appearing in person

Visit our court website to view options and forms that may help you dispose of your citation at www.lancaster-tx.com.

Email your questions or concerns to the Court and our friendly court clerks will be happy to assist you via email at court@lancaster-tx.com.

Call the court and speak to one of our friendly court clerks. We will be happy to assist you with online options and alternative ways to appear and address your concerns **(972) 218-1334**

E-Docket contact the Court to see if you are eligible to speak with the Judge via a Zoom Meeting to dispose of your case or enter your plea. The clerks will be able to set an appointment for you and provide the invitation via email. Call (972) 218-1334.

Drop box you may place written requests, forms, proof of liability insurance, proof of driver safety course, driving records, payments in the form of check or money order. The box is located on the parking lot side (south side of the building). Please make sure to place all documents in an envelope with your name and phone number on the outside. Do not place cash in the drop box.

Credit card payments may be made online at www.thepaymentgroup.com. Payments in the full amount are accepted on line. To make a partial payment or pay your time payment fee please call the court at **972-218-1334** during regular business hours. Monday - Friday 8am to 5 pm.