

# COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Rusk 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 courts of **Rusk 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 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, DSHS representative, 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 1, 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: On a daily basis prior to coming to work.
3. 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.
4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings in court proceedings or any matters where they come in contact with the public, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time, in interacting with the public.
5. Protective Measures: Staff will comply with items set out in 1-4 on a daily basis and document in writing.

## Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: The appropriate courts will confer and cooperate on a block schedule to comply with the guidelines in subject matters. This includes but not limited to hearings, docket calls, and trials. This will be supplemented on a timely basis.

## 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. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by allowing them to appear by zoom or remotely. In the event they are required to appear in person, they will be allowed to appear and to be segregated in an appropriate space.

### **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.

### *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 staff.
4. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

### *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.

### **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers 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 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.

### **Screening**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, courthouse security 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. Inmates being transported from the jail to the court building will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature will not be transported to the court building.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including face coverings and gloves.

### **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the court building for court proceedings will be required to wear face coverings at all times in the courtroom.
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 if the supply is available.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided face coverings and required to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.

### **Cleaning**

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned as needed.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms 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 as available.
4. CDC guidelines will be available as a resource for guidance.

I have attempted to confer with all judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority, DSHS representative, and county judge, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Any individual court modifications to the plan will be attached.

Date: 5/26/2020



Local Administrative District Judge

# RUSK COUNTY

## JUSTICE OF THE PEACE 2 MODIFICATIONS

### Judges and Court Staff Health

4. Judges and court staff **may** wear face coverings in court proceedings or any matters where they come in contact with the public, practice social distancing and practice appropriate hygiene recommendation at all time.

### Face Coverings

1. All individuals entering the court building **are recommended** to wear face coverings.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided face coverings and it is **recommended** that they wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.