

McLennan County Protocols

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 **McLennan 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. Every participant in a proceeding will be required to alert the court if the participant has, or knows of another participant who has: (i) COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms, or a fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea; or (ii) been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19.
4. The Best Practices for All Court Proceedings issued by OCA (Effective March 2021) are attached hereto for reference.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations per OCA recommended practices/guidelines.
2. For clarity, a face covering is not required when a person is in a personal office (a single room) when others outside of that person's household are not present as long as the public does not regularly visit the room. A face covering should be worn when coworkers are nearby.

Scheduling

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building:

After consultation with the judges, most of the judges intend to continue to do virtual hearings for now. The County Court at Law judges have requested in-person hearings on Tuesdays and Thursdays and for half a day on Wednesdays. Scheduling of their hearings will be staggered as to limit the total number of people in the building at any one time. Jury trials will begin on a rotating schedule and will be set forth in more detail in a separate document.

Judges will limit docket sizes to ensure that adequate social distancing is maintained in the courtroom, in the areas around the courtroom, and in the courthouse.

The LADJ will continue to review ongoing pandemic related issues and will revise the schedule as needed.

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. Persons who are in vulnerable populations will have 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).

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 per OCA recommendations/guidelines.
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.
3. 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.
4. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snackrooms, have been closed to the public.

Gallery

5. 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.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

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, McLennan County Sheriff's Deputies or their designee will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 99.6°F 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 and have their temperature taken prior to transport. Inmates with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 99.6°F will not be transported to the court building.

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 cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.
3. No inappropriate messaging should be included on the face covering and each judge will have discretion to exclude a person from the courtroom if he or she considers the message inappropriate.

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 hours.
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.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

Date: March 19, 2021

Vicki Menard

Local Administrative District Judge