

Amended Minimum Standard Health Protocols For All Court Proceedings in Houston County, Texas

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 in Houston County, Texas, the courts of Houston County, Texas, 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. The local administrative district judge may adjust these protocols as necessary for conditions within the county.
3. Judges may begin setting and conducting in-person proceedings immediately in all Houston County courts.

Judge and Court Staff Health

1. Judges and court staff will self-monitor, report any COVID-19 symptoms, and follow the minimum health protocols provided herein.

Court Scheduling

1. The Courts of Houston County may hold trials, hearings, in-person proceedings, or perform other judicial functions Mondays through Fridays of each week.

Remote Participation

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

Social Distancing

1. All persons not from the same household are encouraged to maintain social distancing when feasible.

Hygiene

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of each courtroom, and inside each courtroom.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, and on the judges' benches.

Screening

1. Every participant in an in-person proceeding shall be required to alert the Court if the participant has, or knows of another participant who has: (i) COVID-19 or a fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea; (ii) recently been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 or exhibiting the symptoms described above; or (iii) is waiting on the results of a COV-ID 19 test.

Face Coverings

1. The wearing of face coverings will be optional..

Cleaning

1. When Court proceedings are occurring, Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building.

Jury Proceedings

1. A court may conduct an in-person jury proceeding if:
 - a. 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;
 - b. the court has included with the jury summons 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 COVID-19; and
 - c. 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. All of the trial courts of Houston County may take any other reasonable action to avoid exposing court proceedings to the threat of COVID-19. **A judge may impose stricter health protocols in his or her court other than those required by the adopted minimum standard health protocols set forth herein.**
2. All of the trial courts of Houston County may permit a participant to participate remotely, such as by teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other means.
3. All of the trial courts of Houston County may consider as evidence sworn statements made out of court or sworn testimony given remotely, such as by teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or other means.
4. All of the trial courts of Houston County may conduct proceedings away from the court's usual location with reasonable notice and access to the participants and the public.

I have conferred with all judges of courts with courtrooms in Houston County and the local health authority regarding these protocols.

Date: June 7, 2021



Pam Foster Fletcher

349TH Judicial District Court

Houston County Local Administrative District Judge