

# THURSTON COUNTY DISTRICT COURT

## COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN

### **Statement of Intent**

Thurston County District Court continues to work diligently to ensure the health and well-being of court employees, litigants, attorneys, court participants and the general public while performing our Constitutional duties.

This document details how the Court is responding to the pandemic and the measures put in place to address the risks, comply with mandates, and promote public health and safety. District Court is committed to lowering the risk as much as possible by acknowledging these risks and stressing individual responsibility to minimize them. This commitment is tempered by the acknowledgement that the risk will never be zero, but that there is much we can do to lower the risk as far as possible.

The procedures laid out are based on the most current information from Thurston County Public Health and Social Services (PHSS), the Washington State Supreme Court, the Governor's Office and Washington State Department of Health. It will be updated as information or directives change.

### **Courtrooms**

Following Governor Inslee's announcement of Washington reopening on June 30, 2021, removing restrictions previously in place through the phased reopening plan, District Court will be opening in-person court sessions to the general public. Hearings will continue to be live streamed and available on the District Court's YouTube channel. Attendance by the general public will be limited to space availability in the lobby and courtrooms while ensuring appropriate distancing is provided. The following will have priority in attending in-person proceedings at the courthouse: named parties and attorneys to a scheduled case, those under court order to be present, court staff. Witnesses are asked to wait in their cars until called to the courtroom (notification via phone from relevant attorney or through use of the queuing system). Witnesses who did not arrive by car will be provided an empty conference room or asked to wait in the lobby until it is their time to testify.

To allow for unimpeded flow, the backdoors in Courtroom 2 and 3 have been opened for exiting. Signs have been placed in the hallways to direct people to the exit. Courtroom 1 entry/exit doors have been identified.

Thurston County Central Services continues to monitor airflow in the main courthouse building. The facilities management company monitors airflow at the Chandler Court facility. Both continue to find a balance between bringing in outside air and keeping the building at an appropriate temperature.

## **Calendars**

Calendars are posted on the court's website, <https://www.co.thurston.wa.us/distcrt/>. Hearings are scheduled for both in-person and virtual appearances. If a party to a case is scheduled for an in-person appearance and would like to appear virtually, they may contact the court for further information. If a hearing is scheduled for virtual appearance and a party is unable to appear remotely, they may contact the Court to make other arrangements. Notice of public access on YouTube for Courtrooms 1, 2 and 3 was provided to local print and broadcast media and is posted on the Court website and Twitter feed.

In Courtroom 4, the Chandler Court facility, public observers are limited to eight (8) individuals. They will be admitted on a first come basis.

## **Providing Documents to the Court**

Attorneys will provide documents in electronic format prior to the hearing. Physical documents provided to the Court should be filed at the front counter prior to the hearing. If presented during a court session, they should be placed on the table available in front of each clerk's stand.

## **Jury Trials**

Under Supreme Court order [25700-B-631](#), jury trials were allowed to resume starting July 6, 2020. However, due to the space limitations of the District Court facilities, a new off-site location needed to be procured prior to recommencing jury trials. Additionally, the District Court judges work closely with the Thurston County Public Health Officer to have the most up to date information before deciding on the resumption of jury trials. Jury Trials have commenced as of March 14, 2022.

## **Jury Services**

Members of the public summoned to jury duty and inquiring about excusals from or changes to jury service are directed to call jury administration at 360-754-4107.

## **Jury Trial Process**

### **Prior to Service / Summons**

- The [Court's website](#) provides information for jurors regarding service.
- Jurors may request to be rescheduled for jury service. A liberal rescheduling policy has been implemented; information about the rescheduling policy is posted on the Court's website.

### Orientation

- Jury orientation will occur in-person at the Chandler Court facility.
- Jurors are checked in by the jury coordinator. The jury coordinator will set expectations for jury participation; explain what to expect during orientation; and conduct other orientation activities such as assigning juror numbers, showing orientation videos, and collecting juror pay preferences.

### Jury Selection

- Jury selection will occur in-person at the Chandler Court facility. This will take place shortly after orientation has been completed.

### Jury Trial

- Jurors are to be distanced in the jury box. Each juror will receive one KN95 mask at the beginning of the trial and one after the noon recess. Additional KN95 masks will be made available as needed.
- Jurors will be provided with individual tablets for viewing exhibits; they will also receive individual paper, pads, and bottled water.
- Counsel tables will be at least 6 feet from jurors, the witness stand, and court staff.
- Masks are required for everyone in the courtroom unless there is a determination of the judge.
- At the judge's discretion, witnesses may remove their mask when testifying. The witness box will be at least six feet from the; jurors, judge, court clerk.
- Hand sanitizer and wipes are available in the courtroom. Hand sanitizer stations are available in the lobby.

### Deliberation Room

- Jurors may remove their masks in the jury room only when eating or drinking.
- Jurors will be encouraged to leave the building during the lunchbreak.
- The clerk will remind jurors to not change seats.
- Jurors will be seated at individual tables. The tables and chairs are on wheels so jurors can remain at least six (6) feet apart at all times.
- Only the jurors and the clerk are allowed in the deliberation room.
- Hand sanitizer and wipes are available in the deliberation courtroom. Hand sanitizer stations are available in the lobby.

### Providing Documents to the Court

Prior to trial commencement, attorneys will provide documents in electronic format to the Court. Exhibits which cannot be digitized and must be physically presented will be placed on the table six feet in front of the court clerk.

## **Customer Service**

Plexiglass barriers have been installed at the Misdemeanor/Infraction and Civil customer service windows. Clerks must conduct business from behind the barrier and may not enter the lobby to talk with patrons.

Clerks should wipe down their work area prior to starting work and frequently throughout the day. Shared workstations should be cleaned between each use. Wipes and disinfectant spray are available for these purposes.

## **Probation**

The Court and County have renovated the administrative area of the old jail located in the basement of Building 3 and the probation staff have moved to that area. Each counselor has been assigned a visitation booth which has a plexiglass barrier between the counselor and their client. A phone has been provided for communication through the plexiglass. Wipes and sanitizing spray will be made available for cleaning purposes.

Clients who are unable to navigate the stairs can contact the court or their assigned counselor to notify them that they are present. The counselor will come to the lobby and meet with the client in a conference room. Alternatively, ADA parking is available on the lower level, just outside the probation offices. Conference rooms on the main floor of the building will be made available to counselors and clients for meetings upon request from the client or upon determination of the counselor.

## **Mental Health and Veterans Court (MH/VC)**

MH/VC has been relocated to an office area on the main floor of Building 3, District Court. This area has been assigned for desk duties only, to ensure appropriate distancing of staff and members of the program and public. Space has been provided near the MH/VC offices to allow for confidential meetings between care coordinators and clients. This area allows for appropriate distancing.

## **Cleaning**

Thurston County has committed to day porters cleaning high touch areas throughout the day and regular cleaning each evening. Anyone sitting at a counsel table will be requested to wipe it down after finishing their hearing(s); this includes counsel and parties. The County will provide sanitizing wipes and hand sanitizer throughout the building.

Benches will be sprayed with an appropriate disinfectant at least twice a day.

High touch areas in the courthouse include:

Door handles  
Light switches  
Copy machines  
Keyboards, mice, styli and tables in the courtrooms  
Conference room tables

The Court has also installed wipe dispensers throughout the courthouses and has hand sanitizer in each courtroom. Hand sanitizer bottles should not be thrown away. Court administration should be notified if there is an empty bottle. Hand sanitizer dispensers are located throughout public spaces.

### **Court Security**

#### **Court Security Officer (CSO)**

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- At least every hour, the bins will be wiped down with disinfectant wipes.
- At least every hour, surface areas often touched, keyboards, x-ray, wands, telephone and entrance/exit door handles and handicapped door push pad will be sprayed with disinfectant or wiped down.
- A thorough wipe down will be conducted at the end of the day and at the beginning of shifts.

#### **Security Screening**

Individuals should be encouraged to keep items in their handbags, backpacks or jackets to avoid using bins and submit those items through x-ray.

Court security officers have sight of all areas of the building through the cameras. They will visually scan the lobby and will delay someone entering the building if the lobby has reached capacity. The total number of people allowed in the lobby at any time is eight (8). Security officers will also delay entrance if the total number of people is less than eight, but the line the person is heading for is full.

### **Face Covering Policy**

Subject to availability, the court will provide entrants with a paper mask upon request.

Employees of the Court and Thurston County, including elected officials, appointed directors, staff, court security officers and all other users regardless of position or title are not mandated to wear a mask, but may wear one upon their own decision.

## **Weddings**

At the officiating judge's discretion, weddings may be held outside or in the courthouse lobby. Indoor weddings are limited to four people. With prior approval from the judge, more guests may be allowed at an outdoor wedding. The judge, witnesses and guests must maintain six feet distance from all other attendees.

## **Court Staff**

Court staff are expected to follow any applicable health directives and court policies, including maintaining six feet of distance as much as possible, performing frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer, and limiting interactions in enclosed spaces such as the break room.

The Court will provide support by allowing telecommuting as much as possible without compromising operations or customer services, providing face coverings to staff when requested, educating staff about the coronavirus and how to prevent transmission, and providing hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes and spray.

All staff will be issued county laptops for telecommuting purposes and each position has been reviewed to determine what tasks can be completed remotely and which require an office presence. Depending on the position, that may be on a daily, weekly or other basis.

Responses to COVID-19 related situations will be guided by the information provided by PHSS and included in the Thurston County COVID-19 Risk Communications Plan approved August 10, 2020.

## **Information**

Information and education are provided for staff at monthly all staff meetings and weekly or bi-weekly team meetings.

The Court provides information to the stakeholders and public via emails, quarterly Zoom meetings with attorneys and other stakeholders, the Court's website, social media postings and information provided to local media outlets. The Thurston County COVID-19 Risk Communication Plan will be used for messaging in the event a Court employee is exposed to or becomes infected with COVID-19.

## **Updates**

This document is current as of April 4, 2022 and will be updated as circumstances change, lessons are learned, and directives are modified. The most recent version will be available on the Court's website.