

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

Anyone in a courtroom must observe social distancing guidelines of at least six (6) feet. The benches have been marked to indicate safe distances for sitting. All persons must wear a face covering at all times unless excused by the judge. Witnesses may remove their mask when testifying if requested and the judge allows. Witnesses are at least six feet from any other hearing participants. If a person cannot wear a mask, accommodations can be made to have an empty conference room available with a laptop, so that they can appear remotely.

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 guidance is adhered to. 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 placed in 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, and must wear masks at all times.

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 April 6, 2021, with in-person jury selection beginning on June 29, 2021.

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.
- An alternate juror will be chosen for each trial due to increased risk of jurors being unable to proceed due to illness.

Jury Trial

- Jurors are to be social 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 an exception per the Washington Department of Health (DOH) face-covering directive or by 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 and will be surrounded with plexiglass barriers.
- 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. Masks must be worn at all times. The clerk may wear a paper mask when the customer has difficulty hearing them through a cloth mask.

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 and 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. Staff and clients must remain masked at all times. Paper masks can be provided if there is difficulty hearing through cloth masks.

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.

Lobby

All members of the public should view the COVID-19 signage from the County prior to entering the building. Signs are provided in English, Vietnamese and Spanish. Any persons who enter the building are required to wear a mask at all times unless they have a medical exemption.

Signage is located throughout the spaces reminding people to remain six feet apart, including when seated, and to always wear a face covering.

Court Security

Court Security Officer (CSO)

- CSOs will wear face coverings and gloves whenever on duty.
- 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

In line with guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), all persons entering the courthouse(s) shall wear a mask or facial covering that covers both nose and mouth while in the building unless there is a medical exemption.

Subject to availability, the court will provide entrants with a paper mask if the individual has not brought one or is not wearing one at the time of entry.

Security screening personnel shall request anyone without a facial covering put on a facial covering before passing through the metal detector. Security screening personnel are not currently authorized to do more than request courthouse users to use facial coverings. No one will be denied entry if they refuse to wear a facial covering (See medical exceptions pursuant to ADA issues and other exemptions.).

Anyone appearing for court business who cannot wear a mask will be shown to an empty meeting room and set up with a tablet that they can use to appear remotely in court or to access the court's website.

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 also required to wear facial coverings upon entry. A refusal to wear a facial covering will be reported to the employer for appropriate action within that employer's discretion.

Facial coverings shall be worn at all times until employees reach their regular work areas. Persons going from one courtroom to another location shall wear a facial covering. This includes hallways, stairwells, and elevators, even if the person is merely in transit. Certain individuals may be exempt from this due to ADA application or other reasons. Enforcement is the responsibility of the employer, not security personnel.

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. Masks are required throughout the ceremony, unless there is a medical exemption. 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 wearing face masks at all times, 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 needed, 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. Staff schedules have been developed which require each employee to telecommute for at least some portion of their schedule. Depending on the position, that may be on a daily, weekly or other basis.

The Court has implemented the employee self-screening protocol developed by PHSS and employees are expected to review the questions and initial the document prior to entering the work areas.

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 August 16, 2021 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.