

Hays County Judiciary

Minimum Health Safety Standards for Jury Trials

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 Hays County will implement the following protective measures:

A. Hearings on Objections or Motions Related to Proceeding

1. Parties who are scheduled for a jury proceeding shall make any objections or motions related to the proceedings at least 10 days prior to the trial setting.
2. Any objections or motions related to proceeding with a jury trial will be heard by the judge presiding over the case at least seven days prior to the jury proceeding or as soon as practicable if, with leave of the Court, the objection or motion is made or filed within seven days of the jury proceeding.

B. Communication Protocols

1. Each judge will require the parties to communicate with the court if any participant in the jury proceeding, including attorneys, parties, attorney support staff, or witnesses, has tested positive for COVID-19 within the previous 30 days prior to any portion of the jury proceeding, currently has symptoms of COVID-19, or has had recent known exposure to COVID-19.
2. If the proceeding involves an incarcerated participant, the judge will require the sheriff to report any positive COVID-19 test of the incarcerated participant within the previous 30 days prior to any portion of the jury proceeding, any current symptoms of COVID-19, or any recent known exposure to COVID-19.

C. Summoning Jurors

1. The jury clerk must include with in-person juror summonses information regarding precautions that have been taken to protect the health and safety of prospective jurors (see Attachment A)¹ and COVID questionnaires (see Attachment B)² that elicit

¹ Include as Attachment A the information that the court will include with summonses.

² Include as Attachment B the COVID questionnaire that the court will include with summonses. A sample COVID questionnaire is available at <https://txcourts.gov/media/1449739/petit-juror-questionnaire-addendum-covid-19-pre-screening.pdf>.

- from prospective jurors information about their exposure or vulnerability to COVID-19.
2. Excuses or requests to reschedule from in-person prospective jurors who have been potentially exposed, who are symptomatic, and who are vulnerable or live with someone vulnerable to COVID-19 will be liberally granted.

D. Screening

1. All participants in a trial who are incarcerated will be screened by the jail/prison prior to transport to the courtroom and any known exposure, symptoms, or COVID-19 positive test results within the past 30 days will be reported to the judge presiding over the jury trial prior to the transport of the participant to the courtroom.

E. Face Coverings

1. All persons entering the common areas of a courthouse, including a courtroom or any other location being used to conduct a jury trial, may wear a face covering but not required to do so.

F. Social Distancing

1. Social distancing of all court participants and observers will be maintained, as practicable, during the jury proceeding as consistent with CDC Guidelines.
2. Special attention will be paid by courts to ensure adequate social distancing and managed exits of individuals during breaks, especially when dismissing large groups of people for a break.

G. Microphone Protection Protocols

1. Judges will require the parties to limit, to the degree possible, the shared use of microphones during the jury proceeding.
2. If a microphone must be shared, judges will limit the passing of the microphone unless the microphone is cleaned between each user.
3. Disposable microphone covers will be placed on shared microphones and changed between each user.

H. Exhibit/Evidence Management

1. Judges will limit, to the degree possible, the use of physical or paper exhibits/evidence where feasible or appropriate by converting the exhibit/evidence to a digital form.

2. When physical or paper exhibits/evidence is required, judges will reduce the exchange of that exhibit/evidence to the number of persons necessary and will limit passing the exhibit/evidence to the individual members of the jury.
3. If an exhibit/evidence is required to be transferred from person-to-person, single use gloves will be provided, worn, and discarded immediately after handling the exhibit/evidence.
4. During jury deliberations, judges will make efforts to provide the jury with access to digital exhibits/evidence that would normally be shared with the jury during deliberation. Where digital exhibits/evidence is not feasible, judges will consider limiting the transfer of the exhibits/evidence from juror-to-juror by spreading the exhibits/evidence on a table for inspection from the table in the jury deliberation room.

I. Witnesses

1. Judges will inquire whether witnesses to the proceedings have COVID-related issues.
2. To the degree constitutionally permissible or with the consent of the parties, judges will permit witnesses to testify remotely via videoconference, especially if that witness has symptoms of or a recent positive test for COVID-19, has been recently exposed, or is vulnerable to contracting COVID-19.

J. Cleaning

1. Frequent cleaning protocols in the courtrooms and facilities will be maintained throughout the jury proceeding as appropriate.
2. Shared spaces such as witness stands, seating in the gallery, and seating during qualification/voir dire will be cleaned during transitions of those spaces.
3. Seats for members of the jury panel and selected jurors will be assigned to reduce potential transmission and the need for more frequent cleaning.

K. 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. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated on a case-by-case basis, including teleconferencing, hybrid teleconferencing or an in-person proceeding in a limited access courtroom.