



**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FOURTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA**

ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER 2021-00-09

**RE: COVID-19 HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS AND EMERGENCY
OPERATIONAL MEASURES FOR THE FOURTEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**

WHEREAS, in accordance with Fla. Admin. Order No. AOSC 21-17, Amendment 1, judicial circuits are directed to modify and extend previously enacted temporary health and safety protocols and emergency operation measures.

WHEREAS the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit will continue to implement the following health and safety precautions for Phase 2 to protect the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering courthouses and court facilities.

WHEREAS, pursuant to AOSC 21-17, Amendment 1, incorporated herein, the following operational measures shall be implemented effective August 2, 2021.

GENERAL

1. The court places the health and safety of all "justice stakeholders" at the highest priority. Likewise, judges shall lead during this pandemic by comporting themselves in such a manner to increase the public's confidence in court operations.
2. All judges will continue to use reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely, in accord with the law.
3. The Chief Judge maintains regular communication with the local health authorities and Florida Department of Health and adjusts this operating plan as necessary.
4. **Judges shall conclude litigation as soon as it is reasonably and justly possible to do so, take charge of all cases at an early stage and to control the progress of the cases thereafter until it is determined, and apply a firm continuance policy allowing continuances only for good cause shown.**
5. **Judges shall remind members of the Florida Bar that lawyers must strictly comply with Florida Rule of Judicial Administration 2.545 (a), and shall conclude litigation as soon as reasonably and justly possible to do, and that the pandemic alone is not a basis for a lawyer's failure to prepare a case for trial or otherwise actively manage a case. Discovery depositions**

under Florida Rule of Criminal Procedure Rule 3.220., may proceed using remote means or in-person as circumstances dictate.

EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

Court Administration has purchased and deployed equipment necessary to promote hygiene, social distancing, and personal protection. Additional supplies and equipment shall be updated and procured on a regular basis. Equipment and supplies may be dependent upon funding sources and availability.

JUDGES AND COURT STAFF HEALTH

1. Judges and court staff should, at a minimum, self-check for symptoms. Judges and staff should follow the advice of their personal physicians when sick and follow CDC and FDOH guidelines, as well as local policies enacted by Court Administration when returning to work from sickness or travel.
2. Judges and court staff **are required to wear face coverings** during in-person court proceedings whether in courtrooms or in chambers involving in-person hearings. Likewise Judges and court staff shall practice social distancing, and practice appropriate hygiene recommendations at all time while in public spaces. **In-person court proceedings mean the assembly of prospective jurors, voir dire, juror deliberations, and any status conference, hearing, trial, or other proceeding conducted by a judge, magistrate or hearing officer if conducted in-person and other such proceeds as designated by the Chief Judge.** In all other locations in a courthouse, all persons are recommended to wear facemasks. Persons entering courtrooms shall be provided a face mask if they do not have one.
3. Clear face masks are permitted so long as they comply with AOSC 21-17, Amendment 1.
4. Protective Measures:
 - Hand sanitizer is widely available throughout the courthouse, including inside courtrooms, and the bench area.
 - Masks will be available in all courtrooms and hearings rooms.
5. Court Administration continues to provide available supplies, training, and other technical assistance to judges and/or court staff, if necessary, on any changes/updates to this operational plan.
6. The Clerk will continue to provide for general cleaning of court facilities.
7. Relevant CDC and Florida Department of Health guidance will be communicated to judges and court staff on an on-going process.
8. The release of any sensitive health information shall be safeguarded by all judges and court staff.

SCHEDULING

1. Judges and court managers shall continue to meet with their designated deputy clerks to establish staggered schedules to meet maximum occupancy in each courtroom. **All judges shall stagger each docket of essential proceedings involving in-person litigants.**

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. Upon notice each judge will include information on orders setting hearings, docket notices, and in other communications, informing individuals who are in vulnerable populations of the ability to contact the court to identify themselves as a vulnerable individual and receive accommodations.
3. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by flexible court dates and continuation of existing court dates, as circumstances may require.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

1. Only litigants and persons required for the proceeding are permitted in the courthouse during Phase 2. **Live streaming options** may be available in certain courts, and for those types of hearings where recordings are available, arrangements for purchase of said recordings may be made through Court Reporting Services.
2. All persons who are permitted in the court building shall maintain adequate social distancing. The CDC recommends staying at least six feet from other people.
3. Each restroom has been evaluated to determine the appropriate capacity to ensure social distancing and the maximum capacity.
4. While in Phase 2, public common areas, including breakrooms and snack rooms, remain closed to the public, unless otherwise designated.

Gallery

5. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been posted by the Clerk of Court. The maximum capacity of the courtroom is being monitored and **enforced by judges** and court staff where available.
6. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating.

7. Each courtroom and place where in-person proceedings occur is marked with signage indicating the requirement to wear masks therein during in-person court proceedings.

Well

8. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating are arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing. Marking may also be placed on the floor. Area shields are deployed to each courtroom for enhanced protection to persons in the well area.

HYGIENE (All previous requirements are incorporated by reference to earlier versions of this Plan except as noted)

1. **Face masks shall be worn by everyone during in-person court proceedings. Each constitutional officer maintaining an office in a Court facility shall exercise independent judgment and discretion as to levels of screening and PPE (including masks) worn by their respective staffs and patrons consistent with this Order.**
 - This condition may change based upon the dynamic nature of present circumstances and COVID-19 infections.

SCREENING

1. All persons (with exception of judges, court staff, court security, clerk of court, courthouse tenants) shall be required to:
 - Undergo health screening with a required temperature check. A person who refuses the health screening, who has a fever of 100.4 degrees or greater, answers affirmatively to any of the symptoms in Question 1, or answer affirmatively to Question 2, 3, or 4, shall not be allowed to enter the facility. Alternative arrangements should be made for this person, such as handling their business over the phone, rescheduling a hearing, or other means as appropriate. The screening shall include the following questions:
 - Question 1: Do you have any of the following symptoms (excluding those due to a known medical reason other than COVID-19):
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fever or Chills
 - Fatigue and muscle or body aches
 - Headaches
 - Sore throat
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Diarrhea
 - Question 2: Are you currently awaiting the results of a test to determine if you have COVID-19 based on symptoms or suspected exposure?
 - Question 3: Are you under instructions to self-isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19?

- Question 4: Within the past 14 days, have you had close contact with someone with a COVID-19 diagnosis or who is awaiting test results for COVID-19 based on symptoms or suspected exposure?
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, court security (or other designated person) will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 100.4°F will be refused admittance to the court building. Thermometer devices are available.
 3. 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 as described will not be transported to the court building. Transport officers shall notify the bailiff of the presiding judge as to an inmate's non-admittance. Remote proceedings shall be used to the maximum extent possible, consistent with Constitutional safeguards and protections.
 4. The Sheriffs of the 14th Circuit shall conduct screening protocols for all counties.

FACE COVERINGS

1. Present medical advice advocates that adequate face masks offer the best protection in closed settings. **All persons must wear masks during in-person court proceedings. Persons who cannot medically tolerate mask wearing will be evaluated on a case by case basis by Court Administration.**
2. Individuals should bring masks with them. If a person does not have a mask, one will be provided by the Court so long as supplies last.
3. Clear masks are permitted, and shall comply with the requirements of AOSC21-17, Amendment1.

CLEANING

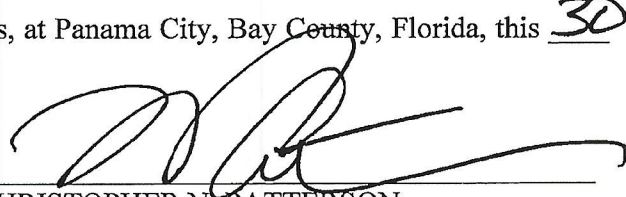
1. The Clerk of Court in partnership with its county shall arrange for regular cleaning of public areas and courtrooms utilizing cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.

COMMUNICATION

All updates to this plan, any ensuing plans and relevant administrative orders shall be communicated electronically, via Twitter, Instagram, and placed on each circuits' website, as well as all other applicable orders. Relevant informational videos shall be placed on the circuit website and YouTube. Any other information or requests shall be handled by the Court Public Information Officers.

This Administrative Order shall take effect August 2, 2021, and shall remain in effect until further order of the Court.

DONE AND ORDERED in Chambers, at Panama City, Bay County, Florida, this 30 day of July, 2021.



CHRISTOPHER N. PATTERSON
CHIEF JUDGE



A CERTIFIED TRUE COPY
BILL KINSAUL CLERK
OF THE CIRCUIT COURT
By Reed L. N.
Deputy Clerk