

4th Judicial District COVID 19-Related Courtroom Practices

June 3, 2020

The Court and Court participants are expected to follow guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including the following:

1. Cover your cough. If you have a cough, stay home or go home if a cough develops.
2. Frequently wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds; use hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol when soap and water are not available.
3. Stay home when sick. If you have any of these symptoms (fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea), stay home for the amount of time listed on the CDC's website.
4. Avoid touching your face.
5. All Court participants and visitors are required to wear a face covering in public areas of the Court facilities including elevator areas, hallways, waiting areas and conference rooms.
6. Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.

Social Distancing and Other Precautionary Practices

1. The Court is holding remote hearings, as well as remote participation in hearings held in the courtrooms, as much as possible, but in some cases in-person hearings and in-person participation will be required.
2. All Court participants and visitors shall maintain appropriate social distancing by remaining at least six feet apart from one another (except persons who live in the same household, who may sit together in the gallery). Standing spaces have been marked at Court counters. Court customers will not use self-check or kiosks and will be helped at counters by the clerks.
3. Seats in all the courtroom galleries and jury boxes have been marked consistent with social distancing requirements.
4. Conference rooms have been marked, a plexiglass divider has been placed on the table and signs are in place indicating that chairs should not be moved. Cleaning supplies have been placed in those rooms for cleaning by users. If any supplies are needed, please e-mail 4thFacilities@courts.state.mn.us
5. Plexiglass dividers have been placed in courtrooms where contact within a six foot perimeter is possible. Plexiglass mobile dividers are also available to provide additional protection.
6. Affixed plexiglass, social distancing markings, stickers, signage and other safety precautions may not be moved or removed without consultation with Court Facilities. Please e-mail them at: 4thFacilities@courts.state.mn.us.
7. The presiding judge controls the courtroom and directs the wearing of face coverings in their discretion.
8. Clear plastic face shields are available for testifying witnesses as needed.
9. Hennepin County deputies are authorized to enforce face covering and social distancing requirements at the direction of the presiding judge.
10. Court participants shall observe all signage, including the sign at the gallery gate that advises: "Do not go beyond the gate until called forward by the court clerk."

11. Court participants may be asked to wait either in a hallway, seated waiting area or the courtroom, given there is a wide variety of available spaces in our Court facilities. Lawyers should generally first check-in with the courtroom clerk as to the case status.
12. The County and the 4th Judicial District have an enhanced cleaning plan to be implemented throughout the Court facilities. The County uses an EPA-approved disinfectant that targets SARS—CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. If a courtroom is scheduled to be used by more than one judicial officer and staff or participants, it will be cleaned in between sessions if a Maintenance ticket for cleaning is submitted to the 4th Sharepoint site by 12:15 pm. In order to best utilize resources, the ticket should be submitted as soon as the morning session is completed. If a ticket is not submitted, the courtroom will be cleaned before the morning session the next day. The high volume courtrooms at PSF, on C11, and at Brookdale and Ridgedale will be cleaned twice daily every business day.
13. Hand sanitizer and wipes are available in each active courtroom, either on counsel tables or near the bench. Lawyers or parties appearing in the courtrooms should wipe down the tables and other surfaces they touch. Lawyers and parties should not rely on court staff to clean up for the parties.
14. Gloves are available to Court participants upon request to the courtroom clerk.
15. Court participants may bring and use their own supplies (hand sanitizer, wipes, face coverings, gloves, etc.).
16. The Court will minimize the exchange of paper with Court participants and encourages Court participants to do the same.
17. To minimize risk of infection, the Court will not provide any beverage, including water or cups, to any Court participants. Judges may permit Court participants and witnesses to bring their own beverages. Court participants must ensure proper disposal or take any beverages brought into a courtroom with them.
18. If an in-person court reporter is required, the hearing will be held in a courtroom where social distancing is available between the court reporter and the witnesses.
19. There is a separate protocol for pilot jury trials that will be available to judges trying a pilot jury trial. This protocol will be updated to reflect actual experiences in the pilot jury trials and then will be made widely available.

In the event anyone has a suggestion for additional placement of plexiglass, the implementation of another precautionary measure or needs supplies that are described above for use in our Court facilities, they should contact: 4thFacilities@courts.state.mn.us