

Covid-19 Operating Plan

Judicial District: 4th District Court

Courthouse: Sheridan

Address: 224 S. Main St., Ste. B11J

Judges: Judge Fenn

** All judges in the courthouse should coordinate the timing of jury trials to minimize the number of jurors in the courthouse at one time; however, district and circuit courts may develop separate operating plans.*

Proposed Start Date of Jury Trials: 8/10/2020

Please identify measures your courthouse is implementing in each of the following categories:
(Please refer to the Covid-19 Jury Trial Guidelines for guidance)

Pre-Courthouse Screening
(e.g. supplemental juror questionnaires screening for high-risk individuals, providing safety precaution information, increasing number of jurors summoned for each venire panel to allow for more excusals)

The venire panel will be split into groups of no more than 25, which will be brought in at separate times. The first group will be brought in at 9:00 a.m. and the second group will be brought in at 1:00 p.m. If more than two groups are required, they will be brought in at similar times on the following day. Jurors will receive a letter telling them what time they should report to the Courthouse.

Jurors can request to be excused from reporting to the Courthouse for jury duty due to CoVid-19 concerns.

The Courtroom will be cleaned between venire sub-panels and before seating the jury.

Covid-19 Operating Plan

- Courthouse Protections
(e.g. operating and inspecting ventilation systems, leaving doors open where possible)

The Courtroom will be cleaned as frequently as possible.
Court screening personnel or bailiffs will wear face coverings at all times.
Hand sanitizer, masks, and gloves will be freely available for use in the Courtroom.

- Voir Dire
(e.g. health screenings on arrival, possible use of larger facilities, staggered arrival times, disinfect courtroom between panels, spaced seating, plexiglass barriers, remote voir dire, providing PPE)

Anyone entering the Courtroom will be screened by Court Staff. Temperatures will be taken, and prospective jurors will be asked health questions upon their arrival.

Anyone with symptoms will not be allowed to enter the Courtroom, and the attorney's will be consulted on whether that juror should be dismissed.

Jurors passing the health screening will be directed to their assigned seats in the Courtroom.

All jurors will be required to wear masks, and they will be seated approximately 6 feet apart.

Members of the public and press will not be allowed into the Courtroom during voir dire due to the limited space. However, they will be allowed to sit in the small courtroom and watch the proceedings via videoconferencing. People wishing to observe the proceedings will also have to undergo health screenings, and they will be required to wear masks. There are a limited number of seats available in the small courtroom, and seats will be given on a first-come-first-serve basis.

Covid-19 Operating Plan

Seating the Jury

(e.g. PPE, implement social distance between jurors while maintaining ability to see and hear, plexiglass barriers, alternative areas for juror recesses/deliberations)

Jurors will have assigned seats in the Courtroom, and they will be required to wear masks and be given the option to wear gloves. Some jurors will be seated in the jury box and others will be located in the left section of the gallery. Hearing assistance devices are available for any juror who might need them. Additional video monitors have been added to the Courtroom to make sure all of the jurors can see the exhibits.

During recesses, the jurors will have assigned seats. Some of the jurors will be seated in the jury room, and others will be seated in the small courtroom. The juror areas will be cleaned as frequently as possible.

During deliberations, the jurors will be allowed to use the Courtroom so that they can maintain social distancing.

Conducting the Trial

(e.g. allow public access via webcast/livestreaming, create separate areas for jurors and public, eliminate podiums, allow attorneys and clients to communicate via electronic devices, limit use of communal microphones and disinfect after use, limit juror contact with exhibits until deliberations)

Pre-Trial Matters

Exhibits

1. Not later than the morning of the first day of the trial, the Parties shall provide the Court with a Binder containing all of the exhibits they intend to introduce. These binders will be placed on the witness stand so that they can be used by the witness without Counsel having to approach the witness during the trial.
2. Anyone touching the exhibit books will sanitize their hands or use disposable gloves.

Podiums

1. The Court will provide Counsel with plexiglass podiums at Counsel Tables. Counsel will be expected to remain at their respective tables, and they will need to ask permission to approach the bench or the witness.
2. New microphones have been installed in the Courtroom, and Counsel will need to speak into the microphones in order to make sure everyone can hear them. Rule 801 provisions requiring counsel to stand and address the Court and witnesses will be suspended.

Witness Examination

1. Witnesses will testify from the witness stand.
2. Witnesses will be asked to remove their masks once they are seated in the witness stand.
3. Hand Sanitizer and gloves will be available for the witnesses' use.
4. Counsel will examine the witnesses from the Counsel Tables.
5. The witness stand will be cleaned between witnesses.

Bench Conferences

Counsel will remain at their respective tables and speak into the microphones for bench conferences.

Covid-19 Operating Plan

- Infection Event Protocol
(e.g. notify public health officials)

If a person has a temperature (over 100), answers any health screening questions in the affirmative, or indicates they have a condition that prevents them from wearing a mask, that person will not be allowed to enter the Courtroom.

Should a juror or other participant become symptomatic during the trial, the Court will notify Public Health Officials and follow instructions on any necessary quarantine.

- Other (if applicable):
(consider and address other circumstances unique to your courthouse and community if necessary)

Observers/members of the public will sit in designated areas as seating allows, and they will be required to wear masks and sit six feet apart from other observers. Only persons attending with members of their immediate family unit or those within the same office will be allowed to sit closer than six feet apart.

Covid-19 Operating Plan

Signatures:

The operating plan should be approved by every judge regularly conducting business in the court subject to the plan. A representative judge must sign the operating plan, along with the city or county health official.

X 

Judge

10/19/20

Date

X

City or County Health Official

Date