

Minnesota Judicial Branch COVID-19 Preparedness Plan

May 15, 2020

Under the Supreme Court Order No. ADM 20-8001 (May 15, 2020), the Minnesota Judicial Branch is to begin a gradual transition from remote work with limited in-person proceedings to increased capacity in all court locations. This plan outlines the health and safety parameters that every court facility must put in place before beginning to expand in-person operations. The branch's top priority is protecting the health and safety of our judicial officers and staff, along with the health and safety of court users.

Guidance is provided from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and is subject to change given the rapidly changing nature of the pandemic.

As the branch prepares itself to expand in-person operations, it is important that staff and judicial officers continue to heed the advice of public health officials:

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. [Symptoms of Coronavirus](#). If you have symptoms compatible with COVID-19, stay home for the amount of time listed on the CDC's website.
4. Avoid touching your face.
5. All staff and visitors are strongly encouraged to wear a face covering. [When to Wear a Face Covering](#)
6. Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible. [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)

It is required that the following health and safety measures be instituted as part of each court facility's transition checklist.

Social Distancing

Social distancing means maintaining distance of at least 6 feet (360 degrees) from others at all times. Guidance on social distancing in courtroom settings is clarified later in this document. Court facilities must use social distancing during this transition period, and it must be maintained.

Social Distancing Exposure Control Measures:

1. Implement flexible worksites. Chief Judges, District Administrators, and the State Court Administrator will identify and prioritize judicial officers and staff returning to court facilities on a business need basis with the objective of minimal onsite staffing and continued teleworking until further order of the Chief Justice.
2. Implement flexible and/or limited work hours (e.g., stagger shifts for those needing to come into the office).
3. Increase physical space between staff at the worksite.
4. Decrease social contacts in the workplace.

5. Increase physical space between each staff, as well as customers (e.g., partitions, tape on floors marking 6 foot (360 degrees) increments).
6. Limit in-person customer interactions (e.g., have public facing operations available for only certain days/times to limit exposure for staff, reduce the strain on personal protective equipment (PPE), and allow for disinfecting areas. Continue to encourage other formats for contact (web, phone, email).
7. Deliver services and meetings remotely (e.g., phone, video, or web).
8. Require staff who are ill to stay home.
9. Provide accommodation (e.g., telework or separate office) for people that may be vulnerable or at higher risk for serious illness.

Face Coverings

Face coverings are recommended for source control* where social distancing cannot be maintained and for public facing staff.

**Source Control: Prevents the wearer from spreading what they may have to someone else; it does not prevent the wearer from contracting what someone else may have.*

Face Coverings Exposure Control Measures:

1. All staff and judicial officers are strongly encouraged to wear a cloth face covering. Staff and judicial officers are encouraged, or if they prefer, to wear personal cloth face coverings if/when Branch procured cloth face coverings are unavailable. Per CDC guidance, cloth face coverings should be washed daily and reused. The Branch has procured 2 cloth face coverings for all staff and judicial officers.
2. The Branch will provide paper face coverings for jurors.
3. Courts need to ensure parties are aware of branch recommendations regarding use of face coverings (i.e. notices, signage, etc.).

Recommendation:

1. Face coverings are recommended where social distancing cannot be maintained. However, face coverings are NOT a substitute for social distancing.
2. Justice partners are to wear their own face coverings in the court facility.

Cleaning and Disinfecting the Work Environment

Each court facility should coordinate with the local cleaning provider to ensure that appropriate cleaning and disinfecting is carried out. If staff is confirmed positive with COVID-19, further cleaning measures of the staff's workspace *must* be implemented by the local cleaning provider. See [CDC recommendations](#) as well.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Exposure Control Measures:

Daily practices:

1. Clean and disinfect all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as countertops, workstations, keyboards, telephones, desks, tables, printers/copiers, handrails, light switches, and doorknobs.
 - a. If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.

- b. For disinfection, most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective (e.g., cleansing wipes or disinfecting sprays)
2. Staff are strongly discouraged from using other staffs' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment. If necessary, clean and disinfect equipment before and after use.
3. Clean and disinfect all common spaces such as lobbies, courtrooms, and breakrooms frequently.
4. Increase air ventilation so more fresh air is being brought into the facility at all times.
5. Staff and judicial officers should disinfect individual workspaces with cleansing wipes or disinfecting sprays:
 - a. Use on personal workstations such as keyboard, mouse, phone, and desk.
 - b. When using disinfecting wipes to disinfect hard, nonporous surfaces, enough product should be used to ensure the surface remains wet for *one* minute. Let the surface dry.
 - c. For highly soiled surfaces, clean off excess dirt before using the disinfecting wipes.
 - d. *Don't* use the wipes to cleanse skin.
6. Frequently wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds; utilize hand sanitizer if unable to use soap and water.
7. Hand sanitizer should be a minimum of 60% alcohol.
8. Hand sanitizer should be available for all judges, staff, courtroom users, and public service counter users.

Recommendation:

1. Maintain stock of cleaning supplies.
2. Maintain stock of hand sanitizer, soap, and paper towels.
3. Utilize commercially manufactured disinfecting agents/sprays in conjunction with paper towels when wipes are not available.

Partition or Barriers

Where social distancing cannot be maintained, especially at public counters and in courtrooms, court personnel should coordinate with property management to evaluate the feasibility of the installation of partitions/barriers.

Partition or Barrier Exposure Control Measures:

1. Each court facility should analyze the need for a barrier at their public service counters, as well as their courtrooms.
2. Barriers could be temporarily or permanently affixed.

Once a court facility has addressed the practices pertaining to social distancing, face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting the work environment, and partitions or barriers, it is required to start transitioning staff and judicial officers to support the expansion of court operations.

A slow, cautious, and phased approach is recommended for the following reasons:

1. Allows all staff and judicial officers to limit exposure to others in the office setting via continued social distancing.
2. Allows the availability of staff to backfill should another fall ill.
3. Allows court operations to be suspended should an office have an outbreak and teleworking resumes.
4. Allows for minimal use of PPE and sanitizing supplies with minimal staff onsite.

5. Allows for adequate time to clean and disinfect with minimal staff and customers onsite.

Non-Public Facing Staff

The following measures must be implemented for non-public facing staff in the court facility.

Non-Public Facing Staff Exposure Control Measures:

1. Chief Judges, District Administrators, and the State Court Administrator will identify and prioritize judicial officers and staff returning to court facilities on a business need basis with the objective of minimal onsite staffing and continued teleworking until further order of the Chief Justice.
2. Managers and supervisors will contact all staff to communicate assignments throughout this transition.
3. If rotating staff through the office, it is recommended to rotate the same staff together to limit exposure.
4. All staff and judicial officers are strongly encouraged to wear a cloth face covering. Staff and judicial officers are encouraged, or if they prefer, to wear personal cloth face coverings if/when Branch procured cloth face coverings are unavailable. Per CDC guidance, cloth face coverings should be washed daily and reused. The Branch has procured 2 cloth face coverings for all staff and judicial officers.
5. Accommodations for vulnerable or high risk staff will be made in accordance with guidance from HR.
6. If staff reports a Positive (or Presumptive Positive) COVID-19 illness, the [Employee Notification Protocol](#) needs to be followed.
7. Frequently wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds; utilize hand sanitizer if unable to use soap and water.
8. Hand sanitizer should be a minimum of 60% alcohol.

Public Facing Staff

The following measures must be implemented for public facing staff in the court facility.

Public Facing Staff Exposure Control Measures:

1. Chief Judges, District Administrators, and the State Court Administrator will identify and prioritize judicial officers and staff returning to court facilities on a business need basis with the objective of minimal onsite staffing and continued teleworking until further order of the Chief Justice.
2. Maintain social distancing as much as possible including between court personnel (consistent with courtroom requirements).
3. All staff and judicial officers are strongly encouraged to wear a cloth face covering. Staff and judicial officers are encouraged, or if they prefer, to wear personal cloth face coverings if/when Branch procured cloth face coverings are unavailable. Per CDC guidance, cloth face coverings should be washed daily and reused. The Branch has procured 2 cloth face coverings for all staff and judicial officers.
4. Limit the number of counters open to limit exposure.
5. Limit operating hours of the public service counters to specific days/times, or business needs to allow for disinfecting and cleaning between customer interactions.
6. Encourage customers to conduct business through phone, email, and web.
7. Limit seating in waiting areas to allow for social distancing.
8. Remove access to vending machines, water fountains, etc. to limit exposure.

9. Frequently wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds; utilize hand sanitizer if unable to use soap and water.
10. Hand sanitizer should be a minimum of 60% alcohol.
11. Hand sanitizer should be available for staff and public service counter users.

Recommendation:

1. Offer options for electronic document intake to reduce handling of paper.
2. Install partitions, if feasible, to allow for a barrier between staff and customers.
3. Consider staggering operations to allow for disinfecting and cleaning by local custodial staff.
4. Place floor markings to denote 6 foot (360 degrees) social distancing measures for lines.
5. Remove chairs or otherwise restrict access to enforce social distancing measures in seating areas.
6. Use stanchions to assist with moving customers through lines and keeping them at 6 foot (360 degrees) markings.
7. Post signage where staff and customers utilize elevators to limit capacity to minimize exposure in the small space, as social distancing measures must be considered.
8. Consider traffic flow patterns to minimize cross traffic (1 door in and 1 door out).
9. Coordinate with maintenance personnel to ensure restrooms are stocked with soap and paper towels.

Courtrooms

Social distancing and appropriate exposure control measures must be implemented and maintained when courtrooms are used. Please note there is separate documentation for jury trial recommendations.

Courtrooms Exposure Control Measures:

1. Maintain social distancing at all times including between court personnel.
2. All staff and judicial officers are strongly encouraged to wear a cloth face covering. Staff and judicial officers are encouraged, or if they prefer, to wear personal cloth face coverings if/when Branch procured cloth face coverings are unavailable. Per CDC guidance, cloth face coverings should be washed daily and reused. The Branch has procured 2 cloth face coverings for all staff and judicial officers.
3. Encourage the wearing of face coverings by all who are present in a courtroom, when social distancing cannot be maintained.
4. Remote video participation, when technically feasible, should remain an option when social distancing cannot be maintained.
5. Spread out jurors to allow for social distancing.
6. Clean/disinfect between each case as much as feasible by wiping down frequently touched surfaces (table tops, microphone, podium, door handles, etc.).
7. Offer options for electronic document and exhibit intake to reduce handling of paper.
8. Frequently wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds; utilize hand sanitizer if unable to use soap and water.
9. Hand sanitizer should be a minimum of 60% alcohol.
10. Hand sanitizer should be available for all judges, staff, and courtroom users.

Recommendation:

1. Install partitions if feasible and if social distancing cannot be maintained to allow for a barrier between participants.

Handling Mail and Hand Delivered Documents

According to the United States Postal Service, the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, traveled, and been exposed to different conditions and temperature is low. According to the CDC, “in general, because of poor survivability of these Coronaviruses on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient temperatures. Coronaviruses are generally thought to be spread most often by respiratory droplets.”

Handling Mail and Hand Delivered Documents Exposure Control Measures:

1. Frequently wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds; utilize hand sanitizer if unable to use soap and water.
2. Hand sanitizer should be a minimum of 60% alcohol.
3. Clean/disinfect work area frequently.

Recommendation:

1. Provide means for public to electronically file documents versus filing paper documents in person.
2. Limit requirements for printing and distribution of hard copies to further limit exposure and/or the need for couriers to deliver packages to judicial branch facilities.
3. Consider having all forms and packets available at the building entrance to reduce the need for members of the public to travel through the building or on elevators.
4. Limit all deliveries (FedEx, UPS, etc.) to one entrance/location to reduce the need for additional travel through the building or in elevators.

Purchases for Ongoing Operations

Purchasing will be coordinated by State Court Administration, the District Office or local court facility dependent upon best price and availability of product. The following products must be purchased and available in court facilities during the transition.

1. Cloth face coverings for court personnel
2. Hand Sanitizer
3. Disinfecting supplies
4. Paper masks for jurors
5. Partitions/Barriers