

MUNICIPAL COURT OF SANDERSVILLE
REOPENING GUIDELINES
AUGUST 2020

Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold D. Melton's Fourth Order Extending Declaration of Statewide Judicial Emergency issued on July 10, 2020 requires courts to use the "Georgia Court Reopening Guide" as a template for such operating guidelines which must include all subject matters contained therein, among other requirements. Therefore, the Municipal Court of Sandersville ("Court") hereby adopts the following operating guidelines to supplement the mandatory guidelines issued. These operating guidelines shall be modified as public health guidance is modified, and shall remain in effect until public health guidance indicates that they are no longer required.

2. General Infection Control Measures

The Court will follow applicable public health guidance from the CDC¹, DPH², and Washington County Health Department³. The Court will comply with COVID-19 procedures, protocols, and policies developed and implemented by the City of Sandersville and Washington County governments. The Court shall continue to coordinate public health efforts with other local courts.

Pursuant to CDC guidance⁴, all persons admitted to the Court building are required to wear face masks while in the public areas of the Court building. Masks are available at the entrance for individuals who do not have a mask. Hand sanitizer will be available in high use areas along with cleaning supplies⁵. Individual offices within the court building may implement mandatory wearing of masks due to space and high-volume contact with the public. The Court maintains the discretion to allow an individual to remove his/her face covering temporarily when it is safe and necessary.

For individuals who do not have a court appearance but are accompanying a family member or friend, it is strongly encouraged that they consider not entering the Court building. People at higher risk for severe illness⁶ and children⁷ are strongly discouraged from entering the Court building unless they are a party to a case.

Everyone in the Court building should comply with social distancing recommendations⁸ and keep a six (6) foot distance from other persons as much as possible.

Individuals are strongly encouraged to leave any unnecessary belongings in their vehicle or at home in order to minimize surfaces for possible infection.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/>

² <https://northcentralhealthdistrict.org/washington-county-health-department/>

³ <https://dph.georgia.gov/>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/index.html>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/protect-children.html>

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

3. Hearings/Pleas

The Court shall continue to deal with pleas in an open courtroom with public access whenever possible. Attorneys and parties will receive a notice with instructions for these hearings. All procedures will be utilized to minimize the handling and passing of paper between counsel, the parties and Court staff.

All members of the public and employees entering the Court building, shall be screened, prior to entry, by the Sandersville Police Department for cough, fever, and recent exposure to COVID-19. Screening will be conducted at the courtroom door. Each person's temperature will be taken using a no-touch thermometer. Anyone with a temperature of 100.4 or higher will be prohibited entry into the courthouse. Each person will be provided sanitizer for hands upon entry.

Persons who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, who have been exposed to COVID-19 within the last 14 days, or who are experiencing fever, cough or other symptoms⁹ of COVID-19, SHALL NOT enter the Court building, City Hall, or Probation Office.

If an individual with a scheduled court date is prohibited from entering the Court building for any of the above reasons, the security staff shall contact the court for which attendance is mandated and inform the court that the individual is unable to attend due to screening criteria. The person who is prohibited from entry should refer to the information posted at the Courtroom entrance and contact the court and request further instructions regarding future court attendance.

If an individual with a scheduled court date has other health limitations, which makes them especially vulnerable to COVID-19 or have other concerns with entering the Court building, he or she should refer to the information posted at the Court building entrance and should contact the court to request that their case be rescheduled.

The Courtroom area is currently taped to minimize contact between the parties, counsel and court staff. Please be mindful of these taped areas. Also, because Court matters are very brief, all extra seating has been removed from the Courtroom. Seats can be provided if needed. No more than 15 persons will be in the courtroom at any time and they will be instructed to remain socially distant.

If a defendant, attorney or witness has a fever or symptoms of COVID-19 and have an upcoming hearing, please contact the Clerk's office as soon as possible. Please be aware that temperatures are being taken with contactless thermometers upon your entry to the Courtroom.

Please enter the Courtroom as directed. You will have an opportunity to speak with the Solicitor and Judge. Once your matter has concluded, please exit the Courtroom/Police Department to protect the health of yourself and the public. Do not linger in the Courtroom, lobbies or hallways.

Hand sanitizer and public restrooms are available for the public to frequently wash and/or

⁹ <https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>

sanitize their hands and the Courtroom and public areas are cleaned and sanitized regularly.

4. Provide Notice to the Public of Increased Health and Safety Measures

The operating guidelines applicable to the Court have been posted on-line, on the Courtroom door, and submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts. To further disseminate this information, some existing court notices have been modified and supplemental notices drafted to include COVID-19 screening procedures and court contact information for those that do not meet the criteria for courtroom entry. The Court will continue to develop such modified notices as necessary. Signage and floor decals have been installed to assist in screening and maintaining social distancing.

5. Provide Health and Safe Access to the Courtroom

The Court will continue to adhere to the COVID-19 courthouse entry screening procedure guidance from the CDC, DPH, and Washington County Health Department.

6. Healthy and Safe Court Employees

Court staff are working in-person at the City Hall each day full time. Staff work and break areas have been modified as necessary to allow for better spacing and reduce sharing certain work equipment.

Staff have been provided hand sanitizer and masks. Court offices, work spaces, and public areas will be more frequently and deeply cleaned than before the pandemic.

Employees are frequently reminded to maintain social distancing, wear a face covering, wash their hands, and remain at home if sick or in contact with someone known or suspected to be positive for COVID-19. Court staff and the judge shall be required to report such illness or contact, take a test if directed, and isolate and/or quarantine as required by the applicable DPH Administrative Order for Public Health Control Measures.

When there is reason to believe that anyone who works at or has visited the Court has been exposed to COVID-19, DPH and/or Washington County Health Department shall be notified and notification of persons who may have been exposed shall occur as directed. This process shall occur according to policies, procedures, and/or protocols recommended by DPH and/or Washington County Health Department . To further keep the community informed, if there is a confirmed positive COVID-19 case at the Court, we will continue to publicly release relevant, non-identifying information.

7. Special Court Procedures


Due to the ongoing judicial emergency, the Court is employing special procedures to minimize the risk to everyone's health. To accommodate for social distancing and cleaning, more court sessions will be scheduled with fewer cases summoned per session. Additionally, seating in the courtroom will be limited to designated seats. Social distancing will be enforced in conferences

with staff. Participating remotely by video conference may be an option if requested. Individuals should contact the court ahead of time to find out more details. Handling of paperwork will be kept to a minimum. City personnel will clean and disinfect areas of the courtroom between users per recommended guidance¹⁰.

8. **Inherent Power**

Nothing in this proposed plan shall be construed to limit the inherent power of the court. The Judge may direct and control his respective cases and those persons before them in his courtroom as he deems necessary for the administration of justice. This order shall be in effect until further modification, extension, or termination.

SO ORDERED, THIS 18th DAY OF AUGUST, 2020



JUDGE IRWIN B. EVANS
MUNICIPAL COURT OF SANDERSVILLE

⁹ <https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html>