



Covid-19 Update

BUCKLEY MUNICIPAL COURT COVID 19 SAFETY PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

The business of the Municipal Court is an integral part of any emergency plan within the City of Buckley. The purpose and responsibility of the court is to protect the rights of individuals, provide access to justice, and ensure the fairness of due process of law be administered and available without undue delay. Actions taken by the court can deprive people of liberties and freedoms through a number of powers.

Judicial operations must go forward regardless of the type of declared emergency. The type of emergency will dictate the essential functions of the court and each employee's ability to work both on and off site. The Municipal Court is the City of Buckley's judicial branch of government and both the US Constitution and the Washington State Constitution require the court to be open during regular business hours to provide access to justice for citizens that may have business with the court. An emergency closure must be ordered in writing by the presiding judge and filed with the Administrative Office of the Courts. When a local, state, or national emergency is declared the presiding judge will issue an Order outlining court closure or limited operations in tandem with local, state, or nationally declared emergencies or disasters.

Given the type of emergency, and if the Municipal Court is available and safe for work, all employees are considered essential and will report to work. In the event all or some employees are not able to report, or asked to shelter in place, essential functions can be completed remotely.

Buckley Municipal Court works with the Pierce County Health Department as well as other local leaders to ensure the health and well-being of court employees, litigants, attorneys, and the public while performing our constitutional and statutory duties.

This document addresses how social distancing and other public health measures are being implemented in the Court to minimize the risk of exposure and spread of the COVID 19 virus. While we are not able to eliminate the risk of the virus, the Court is committed to minimizing the risk by implementing recommended practices by health officials and local leaders, evaluating and modifying our practices and educating the staff, court users, and the public. This plan will be reviewed regularly as lessons are learned and more information is obtained from the Pierce County Health Department and other sources.

Court Representatives are in contact with local leaders and Emergency Management Personnel. The Court will strive, to the extent possible, to adhere to guidelines in making further modifications which take into consideration:

- COVID 19 disease activity (number and trends in COVID 19 cases and mortality);
- Health care system readiness (hospital capacity, number of ventilators, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) availability);
- Testing capacity and availability (geographic distribution of testing, laboratory capacity, test kit availability, and number of tests performed per day);
- Case investigation and contact tracing (staff availability, case management plans, rate of case investigations, availability of isolation and/or quarantine facilities);
- Ability to protect high-risk populations (number of outbreaks in congregate settings; demographic data to identify and monitor high-risk populations); and
- The Court's responsibility to perform constitutional and statutory duties.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Courtroom:

- Courtroom seating established to create 6-foot distance from others.
- Each courtroom session will be limited to no more than 16 individuals present at any given time, including court staff.
- Every court participant will be required to wear a face covering. If participants do not have a face covering, a mask will be offered upon entrance to the courtroom. Face shields are available for those who cannot wear a face covering.
- Each session of court will have staggered start times to limit congestion in the hallways and courtrooms.
- All court staff stations, as well as participant stations, have barriers installed to protect court staff and participants from exposure.
- Court staff will wear KN95 masks while in the courtroom.

COURT CALENDARS

Printed Court calendars are posted near the public restrooms located near the south entrance of the Multi-Purpose Center.

The Court will continue to operate under a hybrid model of some in-person hearings and some hearings via remote application (Zoom). Hearing notices are mailed with specific instructions regarding each hearing type.

Court calendars will be staggered in start times to ensure proper social distancing. If the court participant appears with household family members they may sit together in the courtroom. However, we are limiting the number of court users who may occupy space in the courtroom to a total of 16 people, including court staff. Seating will be prioritized for those who have been summoned to appear for a hearing. General scheduling of cases will be at a rate of 3 to 5 cases every 15 minutes. To ensure adequate social distancing, the requirement that court participants sign for documents is waived. The Judge will review all documents on the record and indicate as such on the document. The court participant will receive a copy of the document via email or US mail. For greater access to the courts, all remote court sessions are streamed on YouTube.

CLERK'S OFFICE

- Staff are still working in the Court office during regular business hours. They can be accessed through phone or email.
- The Court office will be open to the public when Pierce County enters Phase 3 of Governor Inslee's Safe Start Washington Program. All public access areas will be in compliance with proper social distancing and safety requirements, including facemask requirements, floor markings to indicate social distancing, and access to hand sanitizing stations.
- Staff are practicing social distancing and wearing face coverings.
- Signage is present throughout court spaces to remind court users, staff, and the public of the need to be vigilant in following protective measures against COVID 19.

CLEANING, SANITATION, AND AIR VENTILATION

COURTROOM:

- Hand sanitizer is available at the entrance of each courtroom, on the safety officer's table, and at the clerk's station.
- During court sessions the tables, chairs, and other commonly touched surfaces will be sanitized by court staff.
- All pens will be single use only with receptacles available throughout the courtroom once a pen has been used. Staff will sanitize pens after each court session.
- The Multi-Purpose Center building's air filtration system is equipped with MERV 13 filters and antimicrobial sanitization. All filters are replaced every 90 days.

COURTHOUSE COMMON SPACES AND CLERK'S OFFICE:

- Hand sanitizer is available throughout the courthouse building, near all common areas, and at each clerk's work station.
- All pens used by the public will be single use only with receptacles available once a pen has been used. Staff will sanitize used pens at the end of each work day.
- Court staff regularly wipe down surfaces in their work area.
- Signage is present throughout court spaces and all building common areas to remind court users, staff, and the public of the need to be vigilant in hand washing and other protective measures against COVID 19.
- The Multi-Purpose Center building's air filtration system is equipped to MERV 13 filter and antimicrobial sanitization. All filters are replaced every 90 days.

JURY TRIALS

Pursuant to Supreme Court Order 25700-B-631, jury trials may resume effectively July 6, 2020. However, due to the rate of infection, inability to ensure proper social distancing requirements necessary to conduct a jury trial, and other community health restrictions, it is not yet safe to resume jury trials. The Court is currently taking steps to possibly secure an alternative location or alternative (remote i.e. Zoom) appearance procedure in order to resume jury trials. This document will be revised to include the safety measures implemented to mitigate the risks presented by COVID 19 in the jury trial process.

UPDATES

This document is current as of September 15, 2020 and will be updated as circumstances change, lessons are learned, and directives are modified. The most recent version will be made available on the Court's website.