

COVID-19 OPERATING PLAN FOR THE NEWTON COUNTY JUVENILE COURT

Recognizing the need to protect the health and safety of parties, attorneys, visitors, court personnel, and other individuals entering the Juvenile Court Offices at the Judicial Center or Community Resource Center, the Newton County Juvenile Court will implement the following Operating Plan during the existence of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Judicial Emergency. This Operating Plan was developed based on the Georgia Court Reopening Guide, guidance from local health departments, and guidance provided by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH). This Operating Plan may be amended as public health guidance is modified, and shall remain in effect until public health guidance indicates it is no longer required.

When there is reason to believe court personnel or anyone who has visited a Juvenile Court facility have been exposed to COVID-19, DPH or the local health department shall be notified and notification of persons who may have been exposed shall occur as directed by DPH or the local health department.

A. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Screening:

- a. Prior to entering the Judicial Center or Juvenile Court office, individuals shall comply with the screening and entrance requirements set forth in the Amended Guidelines for In-Court Proceedings ordered by the Honorable John M. Ott, Chief Judge, Superior Courts, Alcovy Judicial Circuit, dated July 20, 2020, or as subsequently amended. If an individual denied entry due to screening requirements is a party or essential participant in a scheduled court hearing, arrangements may be made to allow the individual denied entry to participate by video conference or said hearing will be continued until such time as that individual can be in attendance.
- b. Prior to entering the Community Resource Center, individuals shall be screened by Juvenile Court personnel who will take the individual's temperature and ask them if they are feeling feverish or have had any symptoms of COVID-19, have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or any other contagious illness or disease, or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals with a temperature of 100.4° F or higher or who indicate yes to any of the questions asked will not be permitted to enter the building.
- c. When such individuals cannot appear by video conference, inmates being transported from an adult facility or youth who are being transported from an RYDC to the Judicial Center shall be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and have their temperature taken prior to transport. Inmates or youth with symptoms or a temperature equal to or above 100.4° F will not be transported to the Judicial Center. Efforts shall be made to secure attendance by video conference prior to scheduling transport from an adult facility or RYDC.
- d. Staff who are screening individuals entering juvenile court facilities shall wear face coverings or masks covering their mouth and nose, and if they do not provide their own, will be provided one from court supplies.

2. Face coverings or masks:

- a. All individuals over two (2) years of age entering the Juvenile Court office at the Judicial Center or the Community Resource Center will be required to wear a face covering or mask covering their mouth and nose and keep it properly affixed at all times.
- b. Individuals shall bring their own face coverings or masks with them, but if the individual does not provide their own face covering or mask, one will be provided from court supplies.

3. Social distancing and occupancy limitations:

- a. All persons not from the same household are required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet.
- b. Court personnel shall mark and/or identify safe and appropriate waiting and seating locations to allow individuals to comply with rules for social distancing.
- c. Due to social distancing requirements, the maximum number of persons permitted in waiting rooms and areas, conference rooms, offices and the courtroom will be limited, and all individuals shall comply with stated limitations. In the courtroom, seating shall be arranged in such a way there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each seat for persons not residing in the same household.
- d. During in person court hearings, it may be necessary to limit the persons admitted to the courtroom to parties, attorneys, directly involved agency representatives, and court staff. If persons are excluded from the courtroom for social distancing purposes, the court shall make alternate arrangements for proceedings to be observed by a video conference link.
- e. Maximum capacity limitations and social distancing requirements will be monitored and enforced by court and county staff.

4. Hygiene and cleaning procedures:

- a. Hand sanitizer shall be placed at the entrance to the Judicial Center and Community Resource Center, in the Juvenile Court waiting room and in the courtroom. All individuals shall use hand sanitizer (or wash their hands) upon entrance to the Judicial Center or Community Resource Center, upon entrance to the Juvenile Court offices, and upon entrance to the courtroom.
- b. Court and county personnel shall sanitize frequently touched surfaces and waiting areas with sanitizing wipes and/or spray at least twice during the day and at the end of each day. Sanitizing will occur more often, if needed, when court is in session.
- c. Court and county personnel shall sanitize court seating and surfaces with sanitizing wipes and/or spray between court hearings and at the end of day when court is in session.

B. PERSONNEL/STAFF

1. Court personnel shall comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Georgia, the Georgia Court Reopening Guide, and governmental directives regarding social distancing, maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. Court personnel who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely may be permitted to telework and/or work staggered schedules *as approved by the Court*.
3. Court personnel shall make efforts to conduct meetings and proceedings remotely.
4. Court personnel may begin setting in-person proceedings *as approved by the Court* subject to the guidance contained herein.
5. Court personnel are required to adhere to screening requirements, practice appropriate hygiene and cleaning recommendations, practice social distancing, and wear face coverings or masks as set forth herein:
 - a. Upon reporting to work, court personnel shall have their temperature taken by a thermometer provided by the Court or by designated County personnel. Any individual with a temperature of 100.4° F or higher shall follow the protocol set forth in item six (6) below.
 - b. At all times any court personnel enters a public area or meets with a member of the public, said staff member shall wear a face covering or mask covering their mouth and nose.
 - c. At a minimum of every morning upon arrival at work and every afternoon after lunch, each employee shall use sanitizing wipes and/or spray to disinfect door handles, light switches and other frequently touched surfaces in their individual work spaces.
 - d. Shared spaces such as the break room, files room and copier area shall be sanitized with disinfecting wipes and/or spray appropriately after use.
 - e. Common areas shall be sanitized with disinfecting wipes and/or spray as instructed each day by designated staff members.
 - f. To the greatest extent possible, court personnel shall not utilize ink pens, computers or telephones of any other staff member. Said items shall be sanitized appropriately immediately after unavoidable use by another staff member.
 - g. No court personnel shall congregate or enter any other staff member's work space unless a six (6) foot separation can be maintained. There should be no more than one additional staff member per office at any given time. The conference room shall be utilized for discussions involving more than two staff members.

- h. Court personnel shall not congregate in the break room for lunch and should take their lunch periods in their respective offices unless a six (6) foot separation can be maintained if they remain in the building.
 - i. Prior to accessing or touching documents, files or other tangible items that are likely to be touched by others, court personnel shall use hand sanitizer or wash their hands. In accessing or touching documents, files or other tangible items, court personnel should refrain from touching their face, eyes, or mouths, and immediately after having completed contact with such items, shall use hand sanitizer or wash their hands.
 - j. Further Protective Measures: If it is necessary to allow members of the public or individuals from other outside agencies or departments into the office facilities of the juvenile court, such persons shall be supervised (using the standard social distancing criteria). All such persons should be directed to refrain from unnecessarily touching any items in the juvenile court facility unless otherwise directed by court staff. If such persons do need to touch anything within the facilities, the supervising court personnel shall immediately sanitize any such items after the person leaves the juvenile facilities.
6. Court personnel who feel feverish, have a measured temperature equal to or greater than 100.4° F or who are exhibiting signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or any other contagious illness or disease are not permitted to enter the building or will be required to leave the building upon detection of a temperature of 100.4° F or higher or onset of symptoms. Such persons shall report back to work in compliance with public health guidance and County policies, including the County’s Infectious Disease Preparedness and Response Plan.
7. Court personnel with known or suspected COVID-19 shall isolate in accordance with the Department of Public Health Seventh Amended Administrative Order for Public Health Control Measures, or any subsequent version thereof, and court personnel with COVID-19 exposure likely to result in infection shall quarantine in accordance with the Department of Public Health Seventh Amended Administrative Order for Public Health Control Measures, or any subsequent version thereof.

C. SCHEDULING OF HEARINGS

The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building. Until such time as full in person courtroom hearings recommence, the court shall follow these protocols:

- 1. Dependency Proceedings
 - a. Hearings continued due to the Judicial Emergency shall be rescheduled to be held by video conference or in person. For the duration of the Judicial Emergency, hearings shall primarily be held by video conference unless a hearing is required by law to be in person or unless it is not practicable for technical or other reasons for persons participating in the proceeding to participate remotely.

- b. Scheduling priority shall be given to Essential Hearings. The Court considers any hearing that has an immediate effect of depriving an individual of a “liberty interest” or would have the effect of preventing an immediate harm to an individual as essential.
- c. In-person hearings will be held in compliance with social distancing guidance and sanitizing recommendations. Video conferencing may be used to limit the number of participants in the court room. Due to space constraints and social distancing requirements, there may be a delay in placing in-person hearings on the calendar.
- d. For video conference proceedings, the courtroom (or other designated location) will be available for individuals who are unable to participate by video conference. All persons accessing the video conference in the Judicial Center must comply with all of the General Requirements set forth in Section A, above.
- e. All persons attending in-person hearings must comply with all of the General Requirements set forth in Section A, above.
- f. Hearings shall be set for specific times and every effort will be made to allocate sufficient time for hearings normally associated with such types of hearings. Any hearing not completed within the allocated time may be continued for completion to another day and time slot at the next available opportunity.

2. Delinquency Proceedings

- a. Hearings continued due to the Judicial Emergency shall be rescheduled to be held by video conference or in person. For the duration of the Judicial Emergency, hearings shall primarily be held by video conference unless a hearing is required by law to be in person or unless it is not practicable for technical or other reasons for persons participating in the proceeding to participate remotely.
- b. Scheduling priority shall be given to Essential Hearings. The Court considers Detention Hearings and any hearing that has an immediate effect of depriving an individual of a “liberty interest” or would have the effect of preventing an immediate harm to an individual as essential.
- c. Arraignments may be scheduled by video conference. The youth’s counsel should be provided with contact information for the youth’s parent so that said counsel can speak with the youth prior to the scheduled arraignment.
- d. Delinquency matters with issues involving the rights of confrontation and open courtroom will be held as in person hearings unless there is a waiver of those rights and consent to proceed by video conference.

- e. For video conference proceedings, the courtroom (or other designated location) will be available for individuals who are unable to participate by video conference to have access to the video conference. All persons accessing the video conference in the Judicial Center must comply with all of the General Requirements set forth in Section A, above.
- f. All persons attending in-person hearings must comply with all of the General Requirements set forth in Section A, above.
- g. Hearings shall be set for specific times and every effort will be made to allocate sufficient time for hearings normally associated with such types of hearings. Any hearing not completed within the allocated time may be continued for completion to another day and time slot at the next available opportunity.

3. Notices of In-Person Hearings

- a. The Clerks shall include the following information on all notices from the Court:
 - i. Notification that parties should limit the number of people they bring with them to hearings to the extent possible.
 - ii. Notification of screening requirements in effect and to allow additional time for compliance with screening requirements.
 - iii. Notification a face covering or mask will be required to be worn and requesting individuals bring their own face covering or mask or one will be provided for them.
 - iv. Notification to parties requiring interpreters to notify the Court of this requirement at least one week in advance of a scheduled proceeding, if possible.
 - v. Notification to individuals who are currently infected with COVID-19 or in quarantine due to exposure to a person with COVID-19 and “vulnerable persons” (as defined herein) of the ability to contact the court to receive accommodations, such as the ability to participate in a hearing by video conference or to request a continuance. A notice with this information shall also be posted in a conspicuous location at the juvenile court offices.
 - vi. Notification the Court will consider other requests for accommodations on a case-by-case basis from those who live with or care for a vulnerable person, have child care limitations, or have other concerns making it difficult for them to appear before the Court in person or that require access to personal protective equipment.
- b. The following individuals are considered to be “vulnerable persons”: (a) individuals who are 65 years of age or older; (b) individuals who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility; and (c) individuals who are members of an immune-compromised or medically fragile population and are at increased risk for severe illness according to CDC guidance.

4. Public Access to Hearings.

If a member of the public is interested in viewing the proceedings of a statutorily open hearing held by video conference, the Newton County Juvenile Court Clerk, Janell Gaines, can be contacted via email at jgaines@co.newton.ga.us or telephone at (770) 784-2060, to be provided

with the date and time of, and remote access to, the hearing. If, for any reason, a member of the public should object to viewing the proceedings by video conference, the Court will entertain such objection in writing stating the reasons for the objection filed with the Clerk. The judge will consider the motion and the reasons contained therein and sustain, overrule, or enter an order specific to the reasons provided in the motion.