



DATE: April 27, 2020
TO: Media Release
FROM: Judges James, Hall and Nist
SUBJECT: UPDATED Coronavirus (COVID 19) Precautions
Effective May 11, 2020 until further order.

As a result of the Governor declaring a state of emergency related to the Coronavirus (COVID 19), the Stark County Court of Common Pleas, Family Court Division, continues to take various precautions to assist in the containment of the virus and protect litigants and staff. **Stage III Reopening Procedures and Precautions are hereby implemented.** These precautions are as follows:

- **Juvenile** trials, hearings and proceedings in delinquency, juvenile traffic, civil, custody, child support, abuse, neglect and dependency and adult criminal cases will be reinstated on the docket. Where possible and not violating the confrontation clause, many hearings will be conducted electronically. Court staff will endeavor to reach out to counsel of record and self-represented litigants prior to the scheduled hearing with instructions on how the hearing will be conducted.
Arraignments and Pre-trials for most detained juveniles will continue to occur by video conference from detention. Ex Parte Orders in Civil Actions will be heard electronically.
Emergency Removal/ Shelter Care hearings, Protection Order requests, adjudicatory hearings, disposition hearings, permanent custody hearings, and Juvenile Bypass hearings will be conducted in person, in court.
- **Domestic Relations** trials, hearings and proceedings in divorce, dissolution, custody, show cause, and child support cases will be reinstated on the docket. Where possible and not violating the confrontation clause, many hearings will be conducted electronically. Court staff will endeavor to reach out to counsel of record and self-represented litigants prior to the scheduled hearing with instructions on how the hearing will be conducted.
Dissolutions, uncontested divorce hearings, Warrant pick-ups, pre-trial hearings and most motion hearings will be conducted electronically. Ex Parte Orders, Civil Protection Order requests, and most trials will be conducted in person, in court.
- **The phase-in of these cases is described in more detail in a memo prepared by the Chief Magistrate which is available on the court's website.**
- Attorneys are encouraged to work with their clients and one another to facilitate resolution of pending matters.
- The preferred manner in which to schedule cases is via phone and email, however the Assignment Commissioners are available behind glass in the Intake Department. Assignment Offices are no longer open to attorneys or the public.

-  Any individual who is over age five (5) and able to medically tolerate a mask or cloth face-covering shall be required to cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face covering when entering onto the 6th and/or 4th floors of the Stark County Office Building, Stark County Court of Common Pleas, Family Court Division. The mask or cloth face covering shall remain covering the nose and mouth of the wearer as long as the wearer continues to remain on the 4th or 6th floors or until and unless directed otherwise by a judge or magistrate.
-  Additionally, mask wearing is not a substitute for other key Coronavirus safe practices, such as frequent hand washing and social distancing. Social distancing is defined as continually maintaining at least six (6) feet of distance from other persons. Further, private counsel shall be prepared to provide a mask or cloth face covering to their client(s) should their client(s) forget to provide same for themselves. The Stark County Sheriff Deputy reserves the right to deny entry to any person or persons who refuse to wear a mask or cloth face covering or who is screened out following questioning/screening.
-  Following the Governor's directives the court will be enforcing tactical dispersion in the courtrooms and lobbies. The Magistrate Lobby will only be available for courtroom overflow. The waiting area will be limited to the main lobby. All persons entering the Court floors will be subject to screening and must sign-in upon arrival to insure they can be called for their hearing.
-  As an exempt governmental service, the Court will continue to operate daily but with reduced staffing with many staff working from home. Judgment Entries and fee applications will be reviewed daily. Telephone and e-mail messages will be monitored.
-  Requests for video or phone conferencing should be made in advance of the hearing to the assigned judge.*
-  Parties are not to bring friends or family members to hearings unless they are required to testify in a trial or are serving as a victim advocate or another person providing support to the victim in a civil protection order case. Witnesses should remain in their cars until called. Deputies may limit access to those who have legitimate business with the court.
-  Visitation with detained youth will continue to be restricted pursuant to institution/ attention center policy.
-  The Court's Supervised Visitation Program and Working Together programs remain suspended. Parties may contact the Supervised Visitation Program Coordinator for suggestions on alternative means of parent/child interaction.
-  Home visits by court will be altered to meet the Governor's social distancing order.
-  The Court's Teen Court Diversion Program is suspended until the 2021-2022 school year.
-  The Court will continue to operate its specialized docket programs remotely.
-  **Attorneys and parties to cases are strongly encouraged to regularly check the court's website for updates to these policies and procedures as the health emergency remains fluid.**
www.starkcountyohio.gov/family-court

*- Where possible and appropriate, appearances by electronic means such as skype, video or telephone are encouraged and may be required for hearings going forward. Counsel or self-represented litigants shall insure that the Court has the appropriate telephone number by contacting the judge's staff. The Court shall initiate the telephone call. The call will be made as close to the hearing time as possible, but may be later based upon the volume of calls being made. REMINDER: The call may show as "unknown caller" or "private caller", but please answer the calls. If you do not answer the call or are not available when called, the hearing will go forward without you.