CIRCUIT COURT FOR
BALTIMORE CITY

Office of the Jury Commissioner
100 North Calvert Street, Room 239
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Frequently Asked Questions Related to COVID-19

The Maryland Court of Appeals Eighth Administrative Order Clarifying COVID-19 Health Measures in Courthouses and Judicial Branch Facilities, issued May 24, 2021, requires that all individuals entering a courthouse, including employees, to wear a face mask unless they have completed the vaccination process; submit to a written or verbal questionnaire regarding any COVID-19 related symptoms; and submit to a contactless thermometer temperature check. These measures are in place as additional safety precautions to help protect the well-being of all court visitors, employees, and judges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pursuant to the Maryland Court of Appeals Third Amended Administrative Order on Lifting the Statewide Suspension of Jury Trials and Maintaining Grand Juries, issued May 24, 2021, the Circuit Court for Baltimore City has resumed all civil and criminal jury trials and grand jury panels effective June 1, 2021.

Consistent with the Second Amended Administrative Order Expanding Statewide Judiciary Operations in Light of the COVID-19 Emergency, issued May 24, 2021, the Circuit Court for Baltimore City transitioned to the level of operations identified under Phase V of the above order, on April 25, 2021. In Phase V, pending further order of the Maryland Court of Appeals, the Circuit Court for Baltimore City has conducted jury trials scheduled to begin after April 25, 2021.

Furthermore, though Phase V marks the Court's resumption of full judicial operations, Phase V requires continued restrictions to limit the concentration of individuals and allow social distancing, consistent with the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") or the Maryland Department of Health ("MDH") or both, as specified in the Second Amended Administrative Order Expanding Statewide Judiciary Operations in Light of the COVID-19 Emergency, issued May 24, 2021, and the Eighth Administrative Order Clarifying COVID-19 Health Measures in Courthouses and Judicial Branch Facilities, issued May 24, 2021.

Pursuant to the Circuit Court for Baltimore City Administrative Order No. 2021-04, issued May 27, 2021, all individuals entering the Mitchell Courthouse, 100 N. Calvert Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, the Cummings Courthouse, 111 N. Calvert Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, the Judiciary section of the Juvenile Justice Center, 300 North Gay Street Baltimore, Maryland 21202, or the section used to accommodate jury panels for the Circuit Court for Baltimore City located at the War Memorial Building, 101 North Gay Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, (collectively, the "courthouses"), including employees, shall wear a face mask regardless of vaccination status and maintain social distancing amongst unvaccinated persons and in large congregate settings such as jury pools.

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CHAIRS AND TABLES

1. **How often are chairs, tables and chair handles sanitized with wipes?**
   Wipes are provided to enable users to wipe chairs and tables as needed. Handles or "touch points" are wiped daily by the cleaning staff.

2. **Are there assigned seats in the jury assembly rooms? In the courtroom?**
   If jurors get up from their seats for any reason, they will be instructed to return to the seats they originally occupied.

3. **Will there be tables in the quiet room so that I can do personal work?**
   Yes, there will be tables in the quiet room so that you may work during the day and while waiting. Wipes are provided to enable users to wipe chairs and tables as needed. Handles or "touch points" are wiped daily by the cleaning staff.

EXCUSAL REQUESTS

1. **What happens if I just don't come? Is there a penalty if I do not appear for jury service or do not complete my service?**
   If you do not appear for jury service on the date and time directed by the summons, you can be fined up to $1,000, put in jail up to 60 days, or both.

   If you do not complete jury service, you can be fined up to $1,000, put in jail up to 90 days, or both.

   The relevant laws are Maryland Annotated Code, Courts & Judicial Proceedings Article, Sections 8-504 and 8-505.

   There are also penalties for failing to complete the Juror Qualification Form accurately and for not returning that Form. You can learn more about these penalties here.

2. **The jury system is a one-day-one trial. How long is the day? Will I be sent to multiple courtrooms?**
   The courthouse is open to jurors at 7:30 a.m. daily. Please only use the Saint Paul Street and Fayette Street (accessible) entrances. For jurors summonsed to appear in the Baltimore War Memorial building, located at 101 N Gay Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, please use the main entrance on North Gay Street or the Accessible entrance on East Lexington Street.

   You should expect to be here during normal business hours which are 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. During this time, we will limit the movement of jury panels from the jury assembly areas as much as possible.

Jurors will NOT be sent to multiple courtrooms during jury service at this time. If you are selected for a trial, you will be required to serve for the duration of that trial.

3. **I have issues with childcare because schools are not reopening and are only offering virtual classes. What should I do?**
   The court is allowing a more generous policy on rescheduling. You may postpone your jury service to a date within the next 90 days that may be more convenient for you. If serving during a school break is practical, you may select a date within that school break range as well. Documentation may be required.

   Please call the jury office at 410-333-3775 to reschedule your service. The call center is open to accept calls Monday through Friday, between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., except State and Federal holidays.

4. **I am a caregiver and need to be home with my loved one. What should I do?**
   The court is allowing a more generous policy on rescheduling. You may postpone your jury service to a date within the next 90 days that may be more convenient for you to make arrangements.

   Please call the jury office at 410-333-3775 to reschedule your service. The call center is open and accepts calls Monday through Friday, between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., except State and Federal holidays.

5. **Myself or a household member has tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 14 days. Should I report for jury duty?**
   DO NOT REPORT if you or a member of your household has tested positive for COVID-19, if you are experiencing symptoms, or if you are waiting for COVID-19 test results. Please call the jury office at 410-333-3775 to reschedule your service. The call center is to accept calls Monday through Friday, between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., except State and Federal holidays.

6. **Will I lose my unemployment benefits if I serve on a jury?**
   No. Under Maryland law, you will not be denied unemployment benefits because you had jury service and were unable to work or seek work. The relevant law is Maryland Annotated Code, Labor & Employment Article, Sections 8-101(z)(3)(x), 8-907(a) and 8-1108(a)(1)).

   For more information, you can contact the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation.

FOOD/RESTROOM

1. **Can I still bring my own lunch and snacks? Can I still eat in the assembly room?**
   Yes, jurors are allowed to bring their own lunch and snacks. Jurors may eat in the assembly areas but must be mindful of debris, odor and spills when choosing food items. Jurors are not permitted to eat while withing the Baltimore War Memorial building; Tables have been provided outside for this purpose.

   Jurors will only be allowed to lower their masks while actively eating or drinking. While doing so, jurors must observe appropriate social distancing. You must replace your mask upon completion.

   Jurors will be allowed to leave the building for breaks and bring closed food back into the courthouse.

2. **How will water coolers be sanitized?**
   Wipes are provided to enable users to wipe water coolers as needed. Handles or "touch points" are wiped daily by the cleaning staff. We encourage you to bring your own personal water bottle.

3. **How often are restrooms disinfected? Will this happen during the day?**
   Restrooms are cleaned at least once daily by housekeeping staff. Soap, hand sanitizer and wipes will be available in the restrooms.

4. **Will the vending machines and charging stations still be available?**
   For your safety, the vending machines will not be in service.

   Charging stations will still be available for your convenience. The court will provide cleaning solution and or/wipes to sanitize the charging stations before and after your use.

5. **Are there receptacles for proper disposal of PPE?**
   The court will provide trash cans for proper disposal of PPE.

SELF-CHECK-IN KIOSKS

1. **Will the touchscreen self-check-in kiosks still be available?**
   The touchscreen self-check-in kiosks will reduce the amount of time spent face to face with jury staff and will allow you to register faster and more efficiently. If you wish to register with a live person, or have difficulty using the kiosk, staff will be more than willing to assist you.

   The court will provide cleaning solution and/or wipes to sanitize the touchscreen self-check-in kiosks before and after your use.

MASKS

1. **Will masks be required all day?**
   Everyone entering the courthouse must wear a face mask at all times. This includes judges, court staff, and anyone over two (2) years old. If you are called for jury duty, you must wear a mask. The face mask must cover both the nose and mouth completely. We encourage you to bring your own personal mask.

   Neck gaiter masks, bandanas (single and double layered) and ventilator/valve masks will not be permitted. If you arrive at a courthouse without an adequate face mask, we will give you one. Clear personal shields and other barriers are not a substitute for a face mask.

   You may lower your mask to eat, drink, or take oral or nasal medications. While doing so, please observe appropriate social distancing. You must replace your mask upon completion.

2. **Will defendants and witnesses be unmasked while speaking?**
   Defendants and witnesses will not be unmasked while speaking.

3. **Will I need to remove my mask when speaking in the courtroom?**
   Yes, each juror will be given a ClearMask™ to wear while speaking in the courtroom.

   ClearMask™ is the first fully transparent, FDA-approved mask optimized for maximum clarity and comfort. You may wish to visit the FDA website (here) to read about the product and watch a tutorial to learn how to wear the mask properly on your day of jury service.

4. **What happens to people who remove their mask or wear it inappropriately?**
   Masks must be worn properly, covering the nose and mouth completely, at all times while in the courthouse. Any person may be denied entrance or required to leave a court or judicial facility as a result of the screening process or as a result of refusing to comply with the requirements to wear a face mask or failing to maintain social distancing.

5. **Can I wear an alternative facemask (e.g. water jug, shoe, Halloween mask) or one with offensive language?**
   No, masks must follow guidelines outlined by the CDC. Neck gaiter masks, bandanas (single and double layered) and ventilator/valve masks will not be permitted. As printed on your summons, proper attire is required. You may be asked to replace your mask if it is deemed to be inappropriate.

6. **My mask is visibly soiled, saturated or damaged. Will the Court provide another one for me?**

If your mask is visibly soiled, saturated or damaged, you may be asked by a Sheriff's Deputy to replace it with one provided by the court.

7. **I am deaf, hard of hearing, or rely on lipreading to communicate. Do I have an exception to wearing a mask?**
   No, you must still wear your mask, however, staff will communicate with you using captioning or written communication, where appropriate. You may express your concerns with the trial judge or jury commissioner upon your arrival.

8. **I have difficulty breathing (COPD, asthma, etc.). Do I have an exception to wearing a mask?**
   The CDC recognizes that wearing masks may not be possible in every situation or for some people. In some situations, wearing a mask may exacerbate a physical or mental health condition, lead to a medical emergency, or introduce significant safety concerns. You must have a licensed physician complete a medical form in advance of your service date or speak to the trial judge upon your arrival.

   Please call the jury office at 410-333-3775 to discuss your concerns. The call center is open to accept calls Monday through Friday, between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., except State and Federal holidays.

9. **How is the air circulated inside of the courthouse? What is the rate at which air is exchanged in the courthouse?**
   Each HVAC unit has an outside air intake that brings air into the building. Air is exchanged three to five times per hour. As recommended by the CDC, the Baltimore City Department of General Services ("DGS") installed MERV-13 filters to increase air filtration as highly as possible.

PLEXIGLASS

1. **Are there plexiglass barriers between the jurors? Are there plexiglass barriers between staff and the jurors?**
   The court has installed plexiglass dividers between jurors while in the jury box. In addition, the court is requiring face masks, social distancing and encouraging frequent hand washing following CDC guidelines found here.

   In many areas, jury staff are stationed behind plexiglass barriers to protect all users from exposure to COVID-19. All staff will be required to wear a face mask when interacting with the public. Face shields, in addition to masks, have been distributed to courthouse staff.

2. **May I wear a face shield?**

Yes, face shields are permitted and may be worn along with a mask, not by themselves without a mask.

3. **Is eye protection provided by the Court?**
   No, eye protection is not currently provided.

SECURITY

1. **Will there be screening at the door? Will they check my temperature?**
   Consistent with the recommendations of the CDC, MDH, and local health departments, any person who seeks entrance to courts and judicial facilities shall be:

   a. subject to COVID-19 screening questions;
   b. subject to non-contact temperature checks;
   c. required to wear a face mask; and
   d. required to maintain social distancing.

   Any person may be denied entrance or required to leave a court or judicial facility as a result of the screening process or as a result of refusing to comply with the requirements to wear a face mask or failing to maintain social distancing.

2. **Will there be COVID-19 testing performed and anyone who tests positive be dismissed immediately?**
   COVID-19 testing will ***not*** be performed on-site. Anyone who tests positive and notifies the court will be dismissed immediately.

   For a list of COVID-19 testing facilities in Maryland, you may follow this link here. If you are waiting for COVID-19 tests results, please advise the jury commissioner prior to reporting for jury duty.

3. **Will anyone with a fever be sent home? Will they be paid or given credit for coming?**
   If denied entry at the Sheriff's Deputy station, your service will not be satisfied, therefore you will ***not*** be given credit nor paid for coming.

4. **Will access to the courthouse be limited to prospective jurors and essential personnel?**
   Following the Court of Appeals of Maryland Appeals Third Amended Administrative Order on Lifting the Statewide Suspension of Jury Trials and Maintaining Grand Juries (recited here), issued May 24, 2021, and Second Amended Administrative Order Expanding Statewide Judiciary Operations in Light of the COVID-19 Emergency (recited

here), issued May 24, 2021, the Circuit Court for Baltimore City transitioned transition to the level of operations identified under Phase V of the above order on April 25, 2021.

As such, we have resumed all operations and are no longer restricting access to the courthouses. However, we continue to hear matters remotely as much as possible to limit the movement and number of individuals coming into our courthouses.

You may also wish to read the Circuit Court for Baltimore City Amended COVID-19 Response Plan for the Progressive Resumption of Full Function of Judiciary Operations (recited here).

5. **What happens if I, another juror, or jury staff test positive while I am serving? How will everyone be notified?**
Following the CDC guidelines, a potential exposure means a household contact or having close contact within 6-feet of an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more starting from 48 hours before illness onset until the time the patient is isolated. They should stay home, maintain social distancing, and self-monitor until 14 days from the last date of exposure.

Persons will be notified through a process called *contact tracing.* Contact tracing is the process of identifying people who may have come into contact with an individual with an infectious disease, in this case COVID-19. The contact tracer reaches out by phone to someone who has tested positive for the virus to determine their whereabouts and close contacts for the two-week period of time when they may have been infectious. ***It is very important that you provide accurate contact information to the jury office in case we need to reach you.***

For detailed information on Maryland's contact tracing, covidLINK, you may wish to click here.

If you are waiting for COVID-19 tests results, please advise the jury commissioner prior to reporting for jury duty.

6. **Who is responsible for the security protocol? What happens with noncompliance?**
The Sheriff's Department for the Circuit Court for Baltimore City is responsible for enforcing the security protocol. Any person may be denied entrance or required to leave a court or judicial facility as a result of the screening process or as a result of refusing to comply with the requirements to wear a face mask or failing to maintain social distancing.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

1. **Are people required to sit 6-feet apart?**
   Yes. All courthouse members, including jurors, the public, and employees are required to maintain a distance of at least six (6) feet.

2. **Are courthouse hallways labeled with directional signs?**
   Yes, the hallways are labeled with signs directing persons to walk with the flow of traffic and six feet apart from one another.

3. **I don't want to be confined in an elevator with another person. Can I take the stairs?**
   The Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. Courthouse allows for the use of stairways but for security reasons, the Congressman Elijah E. Cummings Courthouse (formerly "Courthouse East") does not.

   The court is mandating that persons traveling between floors by way of the elevator inside of the Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. Courthouse or the Congressman Elijah E. Cummings Courthouse must practice social distancing (there will only be two persons allowed) and no talking will be permitted. Please see the Circuit Court for Baltimore City Amended COVID-19 Response Plan for the Progressive Resumption of Full Function of Judiciary Operations (recited here) for more information on use of the courthouse elevators.

4. **Will court still be held in the Congressman Elijah E. Cummings Courthouse (formerly "Courthouse East")?**
   Yes, court will be conducted in both the Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. Courthouse and the Congressman Elijah E. Cummings Courthouse.

TRANSPORTATION

1. **My bus line is not operating on a regular schedule. What do I do?**
   The court encourages you to find a suitable means of transportation to come to and from the courthouse. If taking public transportation, please visit the Maryland Transit Authority for information on your specific bus route, COVID-19 requirements, and service changes (here).

2. **I don't feel comfortable taking public transportation, where can I park?**
   Please visit our website to find resources for parking and lunch discounts (here). Vendors change discount offers at will. The Circuit Court for Baltimore City is not responsible for discounted or changed offers made by vendors.

TRIALS

1. **What types of cases will be heard?**
   The court will resume jury trials involving both criminal and civil matters.

2. **If I must report in-person, which courtrooms will be used for jury selection?**
   In order to maintain appropriate social distancing, only large courtrooms will be used for jury trials. Additionally the Baltimore War Memorial building, located at 101 N Gay Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, will be used as a jury assembly location.

OTHER

1. **Will we be allowed to bring?**
   a. **Aerosol sprays:** No, not permitted
   b. **Mask:** Yes, required
   c. **Reading Material:** Yes, encouraged
   d. **Pens:** Yes, encouraged
   e. **Travel Size Sanitizer, Disinfectant Wipes, Gloves:** Yes, encouraged
   f. **Electronic Devices:** Yes, but must be turned off or set to vibrate while inside the courtroom
   g. **Water and Snacks:** Yes

2. **Is the court in compliance with Governor Hogan's and/or Mayor Scott's public health mandates?**
   The Maryland Judiciary operates under the judicial branch of government, which differs from the executive and legislative branches. Although we do follow the basic mandates outlined by the governor and mayor, the court has the authority and flexibility to resume jury trials in order to meet its mission and goals.

   You may wish to read the Court of Appeals of Maryland Second Amended Administrative Order Expanding Statewide Judiciary Operations in Light of the COVID-19 Emergency (recited here), issued May 24, 2021 and the Baltimore City Department of Health *Health Commissioner Updated Directive and order Rescinding Prior Health Orders Related to COVID-19* (recited here), issued May 14, 2021.

   You may also wish to read the Circuit Court for Baltimore City Amended COVID-19 Response Plan for the Progressive Resumption of Full Function of Judiciary Operations (recited here).

3. **Why is the court calling in jurors during a pandemic?**
   The Maryland Judiciary provides fair, efficient, and effective justice for all. As we are phasing reopening efforts, the court is resuming jury trials to hear and resolve cases.

Many other states have resumed jury trials. We are learning from the experiences of those states to better protect the health and safety of court personnel and all visitors.

4. **I haven't left my house. Can I schedule a virtual meeting with the jury commissioner's office to discuss my concerns with serving?**
   At this time, remote meetings will not be held by the jury commissioner's office. You may wish to communicate in writing or speak with staff at 410-333-3775 during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., except State and Federal holidays.