

JURY SERVICE DURING COVID-19

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Why are the courts summoning jurors during a pandemic?

Article I, Section 18 of the North Carolina Constitution provides that “[a]ll courts shall be open” and that “justice shall be administered without favor, denial, or delay.” The Judicial Branch must fulfill this mandate in ways that prioritize and protect the health and safety of judicial officials, employees, and the public.

Effective January 14, 2021, Chief Justice Paul Newby authorized jury trials to resume statewide in district and superior court. Local judicial officials have the authority to determine when and how jury trials may resume while considering the COVID-19 conditions in their respective districts. Local judicial officials have been urged to use caution and consult with their local health directors and COVID-19 protocols that have been adopted by the State, and by the counties and municipalities in which they operate.

What safety precautions are being taken at the courthouse to protect jurors?

As jury trials resume, local judicial officials have been urged to use caution and consult with local health directors and COVID-19 protocols adopted by the State, and by the counties and municipalities in which they operate. The Chief Justice has ordered that each senior resident superior court judge shall serve as or designate a COVID-19 Coordinator for each facility in his or her district. The COVID-19 Coordinator shall ensure that relevant safety protocols and mandates are being followed within the court facility.

The senior resident superior court judge must also ensure that:

- intervals of at least 6 feet in every direction are marked with tape or other visible markers in all areas where the public is expected to congregate or wait in line;
- the maximum allowable occupancy of each courtroom or meeting space is established such that all persons who must sit or stand in such space may observe social distancing of at least six feet in every direction;
- the established maximum occupancy is prominently posted at the entrances to each courtroom or meeting space;
- hand sanitizer is, at a minimum, available at the entry and exit of the facility and, preferably, at all high touch areas of the facility including doorways, service counters, stairwells, and elevators; and
- all areas accessed by the public are cleaned daily and that high touch areas are cleaned periodically throughout the day.

All persons who are in a court facility are required to wear a face covering while they are in common areas and when they are or may be within 6 feet of another person. Some counties have installed plexiglass to serve as a barrier and are taking temperatures of anyone who enters the court facility. Notices have been posted at the entrance to each court facility directing that any person who has likely been exposed to COVID-19 should not enter the courthouse. Attorneys and litigants are encouraged to submit filings by mail rather than in person.

Visit your [county's page](#) to view any local orders regarding specific procedures. See the [Judicial Branch COVID-19 page](#) for more information and emergency directives.



JURY SERVICE DURING COVID-19

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



I am considered a high-risk individual for COVID-19 and I have been summoned for jury service. Do I have to appear?

[Contact the clerk of superior court](#) in the county where you have been summoned for juror excuse policy information or refer to your juror summons for information related to requesting an excuse.

I live with a person / I am a caretaker for a person who is a high-risk individual for COVID-19 and I have been summoned for jury service. Do I have to appear?

[Contact the clerk of superior court](#) in the county where you have been summoned for juror excuse policy information or refer to your juror summons for information related to requesting an excuse.

Do I have to wear a mask at the courthouse?

Yes. All persons who are in a court facility are required to wear a face covering while they are in common areas and when they are or may be within 6 feet of another person. In this context, a face covering means “a covering of the nose and mouth that is secured to the head with ties, straps, or loops over the ears or is simply wrapped around the lower face.” A face shield may be used in addition to, but not as a substitute for, a face covering. A “face shield” means an item of personal protective equipment that consists of a plastic barrier, usually attached to a helmet or headband, that shields the wearer’s face from splashes, coughs, or sneezes. A notice advising of this requirement will be posted at the entrance to the court facility in each county.

This face covering requirement does not apply to persons who cannot wear a face covering due to health or safety reasons, who are actively eating or drinking, who are communicating with someone who is hearing-impaired in a way that requires the mouth to be visible, who are temporarily removing their face covering to secure medical services or for identification purposes, who are complying with a directive from law enforcement or court personnel, or who are under the age of 5. It also does not apply to a juror or witness who has been ordered by a presiding judicial official to temporarily remove a mask while answering questions or testifying during a jury trial.

During a jury trial, the presiding judicial official may order a juror answering questions during voir dire or a testifying witness to remove his or her face covering so that facial expressions may be observed. Face coverings removed for this purpose may only be removed while the juror or witness is actively speaking and only if he or she is 6 feet or more away from any other person. The presiding judicial official may, upon a showing of good cause and after consideration of all appropriate health concerns, exempt a criminal defendant from the requirement to wear a face covering during his or her jury trial.

Will a mask be provided if I do not have one?

The availability of masks will vary according to the policies established by local judicial officials in each county / district.



JURY SERVICE DURING COVID-19

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Do I need to bring my own hand sanitizer?

The Chief Justice has ordered the senior resident superior court judge, for each facility in his or her district, to ensure that hand sanitizer be made available, at a minimum, at the entry and exit of the facility and preferably at all high touch areas of each facility, including doorways, service counters, stairwells, and elevators. Please be aware security policies may prevent you from entering the courthouse if you have your own sanitizer. Please contact the [local facility](#) before appearing for court.

If I am selected, how will the jury pool be seated to ensure social distancing?

The Chief Justice has ordered the senior resident superior court judge, for each facility in his or her district, to ensure that: intervals of at least six feet in every direction are marked with tape or other visible markers in all areas where the public is expected to congregate or wait in line; the maximum allowable occupancy of each courtroom or meeting space is established such that all persons who must sit or stand in such space may observe social distancing of at least 6 feet in every direction; and the established maximum occupancy is prominently posted at the entrances to each courtroom or meeting space.

If selected for a jury, will jurors be seated in a small room to deliberate?

The Chief Justice has ordered the senior resident superior court judge, for each facility in his or her district, to ensure that intervals of at least six feet in every direction are marked with tape or other visible markers in all areas where the public is expected to congregate or wait in line. Additionally, the senior resident superior court judge must ensure the maximum allowable occupancy of each courtroom or meeting space is established such that all persons who must sit or stand in the space may observe social distancing of at least 6 feet in every direction. If you have additional questions, contact the [local facility](#) before appearing for court.

How long will the trial last?

Trial lengths may vary by the policies established by the local judicial officials in each county / district.

How long will I be in court each day?

This may vary by the policies established by the local judicial officials in each county / district.

What should I do if I am experiencing COVID-19 symptoms prior to my jury service date?

Do not appear at the courthouse to report your symptoms. If you begin experiencing COVID-19 symptoms prior to your jury service date, please [inform the clerk of superior court](#) in the county where you were summoned by phone.



JURY SERVICE DURING COVID-19

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



What should I do if I experience COVID-19 symptoms during my jury service?

If you begin experiencing COVID-19 symptoms during your period of jury service while at the court facility, please inform the nearest court official (e.g., clerk, bailiff).

What should I do if I have concerns about the safety measures in the courthouse or if I feel safety precautions are not being followed?

If at any time during your jury service you are concerned about your health or safety due to a lack of safety measures or because guidelines are not being followed (e.g., social distancing is not being practiced, there is no hand sanitizer at the courthouse entrance), please bring your concerns to the attention of the judge, the clerk, or the bailiff to be addressed.

