Supreme Court of Missouri revises operational directives for local courts in response to increased accessibility to approved COVID-19 vaccines

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Given increased accessibility to approved COVID-19 vaccines, the Supreme Court of Missouri has revised its operational directives to further guide courts statewide in remaining open and able to carry out their core, constitutional functions while ensuring the safety of their employees and the public. The Court's order, issued Friday, replaces the prior operational directives in place since May 2020 and last modified in July 2020.

Recognizing that local COVID-19 levels continue to fluctuate and appropriate precautionary measures for each court facility still vary, the modified operational directives add a less restrictive operating phase to those in place since last May. The directives are designed to help courts navigate resuming in-person court proceedings, with the public and court personnel at various stages of vaccination, while operating in a manner that protects all persons who have business in Missouri courts, regardless of their vaccination status.

Under the operational directives:

- Local courts may operate in one of four operating phases, each reflecting differing approaches to in-person proceedings, personnel and staffing, and courthouse operations.
- A court may not move to a higher operating phase unless it has been in the prior operating phase for at least 14 days, but it may revert immediately to a prior operating phase when local conditions and circumstances so require.
- Courts operating in Phases One through Four should consider using HEPA filters to maintain air quality given the specific size of each courtroom, office or space in the court facility.
- A local court may move to Phase Four only upon approved COVID-19 vaccines being readily accessible in the community in which the courthouse or court facility is located.
- Phase Four operations continue precautionary measures when interacting with the public while easing such restrictions among court personnel:
    - Regardless of their vaccination status, all individuals are required to follow social distancing protocols and wear masks or face coverings in court proceedings and in public areas of the court facility.
    - Court personnel with limited or no interaction with the public in their respective or shared workspaces are not required to wear face masks or coverings or comply with social distancing protocols.

As has been the case since March 2020, courts are encouraged to continue using all available technologies to conduct activities remotely to limit the number of in-person proceedings conducted in courthouses. As has been the case since May, as local courts transition through the defined operating phases, they are required to notify the public and this Court so notice of the operating phase can be posted to the Missouri Courts' interactive pandemic website, https://www.courts.mo.gov/pandemic/.

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