Administrative Office of the Courts

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New Mexico Judiciary changing mask requirements and other COVID-safe protocols at courthouses

SANTA FE – Members of the public may enter a New Mexico courthouse or judicial building without a mask or protective face covering starting March 21. However, masks will continue to be required for any person inside a courtroom or jury assembly area.

In recognition of changes in the COVID-19 pandemic, the state Supreme Court today announced updated public health precautionary procedures and practices for New Mexico courts — appellate, district, metropolitan, magistrate, municipal and probate courts.

"While we hope that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, it remains crucial that New Mexico courts continue to take prudent steps to protect the health and well-being of jurors, litigants, attorneys, judicial employees, judges and all others entering a courthouse," Chief Justice Michael Vigil said.

The following COVID-safe protocols will take effect March 21:

- Members of the public can enter a courthouse without a protective face covering, but health screening questions will continue to be required for anyone to gain entrance to a judicial building or courthouse.

- Masks will be required for any person inside a courtroom or jury assembly areas. This includes members of the public, jurors, attorneys, defendants, litigants, law enforcement, court staff and judges.

- Physical distancing of 3-feet will be enforced inside courthouses and while people enter or exit a judicial building. Previously, people were required to maintain a minimum of six-feet distancing to help limit the spread of COVID-19.

"The reduced physical distancing should help courts conduct additional trials by allowing them to more efficiently use available space in courtrooms and jury assembly areas," said Justice C.

Shannon Bacon, who leads the Supreme Court's Emergency Response Team that developed the revised protocols.

Court employees, judges and hearing officers must continue to wear masks while interacting with the public and in courtrooms or jury assembly areas, but otherwise they no longer must wear a protective face covering inside their work areas.

The Judiciary will maintain a requirement for weekly COVID-19 testing of unvaccinated judicial employees, judges and contractors.

"Because jurors and many members of the public have no choice but to come to court, the Judiciary will remain vigilant and take a careful approach to adjusting its COVID-safe protocols as the pandemic changes," Chief Justice Vigil said.

Until the new protocols take effect on March 21, masks will continue to be required for anyone entering a New Mexico courthouse or judicial building.

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