



Imperial County Superior Court Master Plan to Fully Restore Court Services

Introduction

The Imperial County Superior Court is committed to protecting the health and safety of our community while performing our constitutional duties. The health and welfare of each judicial officer, employee, contractor, and member of the public that enters our facilities is paramount in the decisions that are made as the Imperial County Superior Court begins to restore full services.

The Imperial County Superior Court is monitoring local, state, and federal public health directives related to COVID-19, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, and will continue to update the Master Plan as appropriate. This Master Plan for restoring services is fluid and will largely depend on policy-setting and guidance from the Judicial Council of California, and local, state and federal officials; therefore, this document will be updated periodically and further refined as the phases in the plan are solidified. The Master Plan to restore court services addresses public access, court facilities, and court operations.

Following the guidelines provided by Governor Newsom's Executive Orders and the County of Imperial's orders by the Public Health Officer, on March 23, 2020 the Court suspended all non-essential functions and began hearing only specific limited cases and emergency matters due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (See *General Order 2020-01 dated 03/19/20.*) Since then, the Court has been able to handle many matters remotely and increased hearings in all departments. But, these types of hearings are problematic, to say the least, when not conducted in a courtroom. Also, the Access Center has been closed and the only way assistance is available is by phone which is very difficult for self-represented litigants.

Beginning October 5, 2020, Imperial County Superior Court will gradually begin to conduct in person court sessions, with modifications, in a phased-in manner. This will allow for social distancing in courtrooms and public areas. This will also allow the Court to monitor the number of people in courtrooms and public areas and to insure safety measures are taken before each new phase is started.

Phase 1: Civil and Probate calendars and Family Law long cause matters. **
Small Claims Advisor and Access Center - by appointment only. Civil Clerk's office, by appointment only, with the exception of emergency services such as restraining orders. Law Library, Jury Commissioner's office, and Criminal clerk's office will fully open without restrictions.

Phase 2: All other Family Law matters, Restraining Order hearings, Traffic and Small Claims. Traffic clerks' offices will fully open without restriction. **

Phase 3: Juvenile and Mental Health calendars. **

Phase 4: Criminal and Family Support. **
In-Custody Arraignments will continue to be done remotely.

Phase 5: Allow full access to Court by the Public with COVID-19 precautions. **

Phase 6: Return to full Court operations without any COVID-19 precautions.

** *Some calendars may have matters time staggered to ensure proper distancing in*

courtrooms and public areas.

Once a phase is started, the only remote appearances allowed will be those allowed before the emergency plus any that are allowed by the California Rules of Court. (Except in-custody arraignments will continue to be done remotely).

Public Access

For those attending live, in-person proceedings, which will start under this plan, the following applies:

- You must have a case on calendar to enter the courthouse and courtroom.
- Attorneys entering any courthouses must have a matter on calendar or going to a clerk's office or the Law Library.
- Witnesses will be allowed to enter and must be prepared to state which courtroom he or she will be appearing.
- Friends, family, and other companions are not allowed to enter the courthouses unless specifically permitted, e.g. victim support person.
- The media may continue to enter the courthouses and courtrooms during this restoration period.

Self-Help

The Court's Self-Help Center is currently closed to the public but in person appointments will begin in Phase 1. Self-Help Center services continue to be available via phone and email. Self-Represented litigants may request assistance with Family Law, Family Support, and some Probate matters. Additionally, educational workshops and forms review will also be available over the following weeks through online appointments with self-help staff, webinar workshops, and video conferencing.

As part of court facilities taking measures to comply with current health directives, the Self-Help Center has implemented protocols to maintain sanitary conditions and ensure adequate social distancing to allow for in-person legal assistance.

Mediation Services

Family Mediator continues to conduct mediation services via remote.

Clerk Offices

Clerks' offices at the El Centro Courthouse are open for limited services and processing filings until full access is restored as noted above. This includes:

- Filings for Civil and Probate matters
- Request family law emergency orders (i.e. custody/visitation)
- Request other types of emergency ex parte application relief

For non-emergency matters, customers may file documents in one of two ways:

- Online via the eDelivery Document Submission Portal
- Mailed or delivered to the court for processing. Addresses can be found on the court's website <https://imperial.courts.ca.gov/>.

- Payments for Traffic and Criminal matter can be made through our court's website <https://imperial.courts.ca.gov/>, even after offices are open to the public.

The Court anticipates opening all Clerks' offices in Phase 2.

Facilities

Pursuant to the order of the Presiding Judge, El Centro Courthouse is currently open with limited services but will begin restoring services as noted above. Winterhaven and Brawley Courts remain closed for public access until further order of the Court. The Court anticipates opening these two courts no later than Phase 4.

Safety Precautions

The Court has instituted measures to comply with the current health directives issued by local, state, and federal officials. Some of these measures include the following:

- Until further order of the Court, face coverings are required, for the public to enter all Imperial County courthouses. Court security will turn away any person not wearing a face covering prior to security screening. Face coverings can be scarves (dense fabric, without holes), bandana, neck gaiter, or other fabric face covering.
- Enhanced screening measures at open court facilities are being used to mitigate possible exposure, such as screening questions and temperature checks.
- Those who are feeling ill or experiencing flu-like symptoms, have a fever, are coughing or sneezing, or have been diagnosed with COVID-19 should not come to, or enter, the courthouses.
- Limiting the number of participants present to allow for six-feet of separation in public lobby or waiting areas, clerks' offices and courtrooms.
- Daily sanitation and disinfection throughout the day.
- Court participants maintaining a 6-foot distance from each other using courtroom layouts and public area designated seating to facilitate that separation.
- Precautionary Measures that are taken and will continue to be taken by the Court to Prevent Spread of COVID-19 can be found on our website <https://imperial.courts.ca.gov/>.

Telephonic/Video Remote Appearances

The Court currently requires that judicial proceedings for most case types and court operations be conducted remotely. This is to protect the health and safety of the public, including court users, both in-custody and out-of-custody defendants, witnesses, court personnel, judicial officers, and others.

Beginning October 5, 2020, Imperial County Superior Court will gradually reopen with modifications as noted above. Remote appearances will phase out with the implementation of each phase unless noted otherwise.

Court Operations

The Court continues to make kiosks available for remote hearings at El Centro, Brawley, and Winterhaven courts.

CRIMINAL

The Court continues to hear misdemeanor and felony cases using the GoToMeeting platform.

TRAFFIC

The Court continues to hear Traffic hearings using the GoToMeeting platform.

SMALL CLAIMS

The Court continues to hear Small Claims cases using the GoToMeeting platform.

FAMILY SUPPORT

The Court continues to hear Family Support cases using the GoToMeeting platform.

JUVENILE

The Court continues to review and triage Delinquency calendars on a weekly basis. The Court continues to hear juvenile cases using the GoToMeeting platform.

FAMILY LAW

The Court continues to hear Family Law cases using the GoToMeeting platform. Beginning October 5th the Court will resume in-person long cause hearings and all other Family Law matters beginning October 13th.

CIVIL AND PROBATE

Beginning October 5, 2020, Imperial County Superior Court will resume live, in-person hearings with modifications.

JURY TRIALS

The Court has a plan that allows summoned jurors to enter courthouses, while addressing crowd size, physical distancing and other safety measures. Jury Trials commenced September 22, 2020.