



## SUPREME COURT OF YUKON

### NOTICE TO PUBLIC AND TO PROFESSION

June 19, 2020

Beginning July 6, 2020, the Supreme Court will resume hearing matters in-person as long as they are able to take place safely and in accordance with the protocols outlined below, based on the recommendations of the office of the Yukon's Chief Medical Officer of Health.

**As this situation evolves, we will continue to monitor and assess information. There may be amended Notices, or changes without advance notice, in response to any changes in the COVID-19 situation in the Yukon and guidance from the office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Please continue to monitor the Supreme Court Website, [www.yukoncourts.ca](http://www.yukoncourts.ca), for updates or follow us on twitter at @YukonCourts.**

#### I. PROTOCOL IN COURTROOMS

The following general precautions to ensure everyone's safety will apply to all in-person court hearings, appearances and trials. Judges have the discretion to direct more detailed or different precautions depending on the circumstances of a particular court hearing.

We recognize that particular circumstances may require counsel, a party or a witness to be present only by video or phone, such as when travel to the Yukon is not possible, or self-isolation is required. The Court will continue to assess the feasibility of hearing matters partially in person and partially by phone or video on a case by case basis, subject to *Criminal Code* requirements for criminal cases.

#### **Screening Process for Persons Entering the Courtrooms**

If you have any symptoms of illness that may be COVID-19, you should not come to the courthouse or courtrooms. However, if you are a party, an accused, or a witness whose presence is required in court, please ensure that you inform your counsel or the Trial Coordinator of your health situation before the time of your scheduled court appearance.

The Government of Yukon website outlines the symptoms of COVID-19 as follows:

- cough;

- fever/chills;
- sore throat;
- difficulty breathing;
- headache;
- runny nose or nasal congestion;
- vomiting;
- diarrhea;
- fatigue; or
- muscle aches.

Counsel and self-represented parties may be asked to confirm at any in-person court appearance that to their knowledge, no one involved on their side, including witnesses and support persons, has any symptoms of illness that may be COVID-19, or has had contact with anyone who has symptoms that may be COVID-19.

The Sheriffs will screen people entering the courtrooms. If they observe anyone displaying symptoms that may be COVID-19, Sheriffs have the discretion to exclude observers from the courtroom, subject to the Judge's direction. Sheriffs and/or counsel will advise the Court of any court participants displaying such symptoms, at which time the Court will address the issue if necessary.

If during or after the proceedings, counsel, parties or participants become aware that they or someone they have been in contact within the previous 14 days have experienced symptoms related to COVID-19, they shall notify public health officials and the Trial Coordinator and follow all directions provided.

### **Cleaning and Sanitation**

Anyone entering the courthouse shall use hand sanitizer upon entry. Hand sanitizer will be available by the entrances and exits of the courthouse.

Anyone entering any courtroom shall use hand sanitizer again upon entry. Hand sanitizer will be available at the entrance to the courtroom, court clerk's desk, witness box, bench and counsel tables.

The gallery seats and surface areas, door handles, clerk's desk, witness box, witness chair, microphones, prisoner box, witness rooms, counsel tables and chairs, bar and swinging doorway in the bar, and bench, will be cleaned after each use. All courtrooms will be cleaned in their entirety at the end of each day.

If a witness swears an oath, the Bible or any other religious document will be disinfected after its use.

### **Courtroom Layout**

Physical distancing measures among all people in the courtroom must be maintained.

Each counsel will have their own podium at the respective ends of each counsel table. There will be stickers in the gallery seating to indicate where people must sit in order to maintain physical distancing.

There will be plexiglass installed around the witness box, in front of the clerk's desk, and at counsel podiums, recognizing that physical distancing may be difficult to be maintained in those areas at all times.

Brief adjournments will be granted to counsel during a hearing to communicate with their client or co-counsel outside the courtroom to accommodate physical distancing and confidentiality.

In the exceptional case where counsel needs to communicate with their client or co-counsel in the courtroom in a non-physically distancing manner, which is discouraged, each person will be required to complete a declaration form, available in the courtroom, indicating they are not experiencing any symptoms that may be COVID-19. The declaration forms shall be provided to the clerk for the file. The Judge may also request that people communicating in the courtroom in a non-physically distancing manner wear masks.

### **Numbers of People in the Courtroom**

The need for physical distancing may mean, in some cases, that it will not be possible for everyone to be present in the courtroom, especially in the smaller courtrooms. Priority will be given to participants in the hearing, and support people including family, victim services workers, FASSY workers, mental wellness counsellors, and probation officers.

Members of the media and the public, as always, are permitted to attend court (except in family matters or in exceptional court-ordered circumstances or where there are statutory requirements). If there is insufficient space in the courtroom to accommodate everyone, a conference call number will be provided for the media and members of the general public to call in to hear the proceedings.

The Sheriffs have discretion to allow people into the courtroom on the basis of these priorities, subject to the Judge's direction.

### **Masks**

At this stage masks are not required to be worn in the courtroom. Anyone may wear a mask, if they choose, with the exception of witnesses when they are giving evidence under oath or affirmation. The Judge may in their discretion ask court participants to wear masks, if circumstances require, such as where physical distancing is not being followed and there are no safety barriers to reduce possible transmission of the virus. Masks will be available in the courtrooms.

## II. CRIMINAL MATTERS

At this time, we are unable to schedule jury trials in the summer and fall of 2020. Jury trials are being scheduled in 2021.

Judge alone trials will proceed as long as the safety protocol described above is followed.

In-custody accused may continue to appear by video for short appearances, if desired, or as ordered by the Judge. Otherwise, they may appear in person, as long as the safety protocol described above is followed.

Criminal Chambers will occur on scheduled Tuesdays, starting July 14, 2020 at 1:30 p.m. Dates will be posted on the Court website. (Please see Practice Direction Criminal-6).

Pre-trial conferences where all parties are represented by counsel shall continue to occur by phone unless otherwise requested by counsel.

If one or more parties is self-represented, the Judge shall exercise their discretion in deciding whether to hold the pre-trial conference in person or by telephone.

## III. FAMILY MATTERS

Family Chambers will occur on scheduled Tuesdays, starting July 14, 2020 in **Courtroom 1** from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Dates will be posted on the Court website. Please ensure that matters scheduled on a Chambers day are 30 minutes or less in total, and are unlikely to be adjourned. If a matter is anticipated to take longer than 30 minutes, please contact the Clerk to schedule special time. If the matter is likely to be adjourned, please contact the Clerk to add the matter to the next Chambers day. (Please see Practice Direction Family-8).

Family Law Case Conferences and Judicial Settlement Conferences shall resume in person, as long as physical distancing can be maintained.

## IV. CIVIL MATTERS

Civil Chambers will occur on scheduled Tuesdays, starting July 14, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. Dates will be posted on the Court website. (Please see Practice Direction Civil-3).

Appearance Days will occur on scheduled Tuesdays, starting July 14, 2020 at 4:00 p.m. Dates will be posted on the Court website.

Case Management Conferences where all parties are represented by counsel will continue to occur by phone unless otherwise requested by counsel.

If one or more parties is self-represented, the Judge may exercise their discretion in deciding whether to hold the conference in person or by telephone.

Settlement Conferences will resume in person, as long as physical distancing can be maintained.

Applications or trials requiring in-person testimony will proceed as long as the safety protocol described above is followed.

## V. COURT REGISTRY

### **In-Person Attendances and Filing**

The public door into the Registry will continue to be locked but the Registry will accommodate in-person attendances, after July 6, 2020, as long as physical distancing measures are respected. Registry staff may refuse access to the Registry to anyone who does not comply with physical distancing requirements.

### **Email Filing**

**Email filing will not be permitted after July 6, 2020, unless there are exceptional circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic.** The Court currently does not have an electronic filing system. The email filing that has been permitted over the last several months was a temporary measure to address the restrictions in place as a result of COVID-19. Unfortunately, it is impractical and time-consuming for Registry staff.

The Court recognizes the benefits and is supportive of implementing a proper electronic filing system in the future.

### **Service and Delivery**

As of July 6, 2020, all documents are required to be served or delivered according to the *Rules of Court* of the Supreme Court. No email service is permitted unless it is done according to the *Rules of Court*.


### **Affidavits**

As long as the state of emergency exists in Yukon, affidavits may be sworn or affirmed remotely, using technology that allows individuals to see, hear and communicate with each other in real time, if all parties are in the Yukon. The affidavit must contain a statement by the person administering it that it was sworn or affirmed in accordance with Ministerial Order 2020/39 ([http://www.gov.yk.ca/legislation/regs/mo2020\\_039.pdf](http://www.gov.yk.ca/legislation/regs/mo2020_039.pdf)).

## Wills

As long as a state of emergency exists in Yukon, the requirements for execution, revocation, alteration or revival of a will where all persons signing the will must be “present” or “in the presence of”, include being present by technology that allows individuals to see, hear and communicate with each other in real time.

The testator, person signing on behalf of the testator and all witnesses must be in Yukon. If someone is signing on behalf of the testator, the person must be physically present with the testator and the testator must have an identical copy of the will. Measures must be in place to ensure that the will is being signed at the direction of the testator. Each signatory is required to sign an identical copy of the will. All signed, identical copies together constitute the will. The will must contain a statement by the lawyer witness that the above was done in accordance with Ministerial Order 2020/39.



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Chief Justice R.S. Veale