

District Court Judges

Donald Hager
Presiding Judge

Lolita G. Hartl Romanick
District Judge

John A. Thelen
District Judge

M. Jason McCarthy
District Judge

Jay D. Knudson
District Judge

Juvenile Court

Shawn Peterson
Director of Juvenile Court
(701) 787-2770

**State of North Dakota
Northeast Central Judicial District**

Grand Forks County
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Grand Forks, ND 58201

Nelson County
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Lakota, ND 58344

Court Administration

Scott K. Johnson
Trial Court Administrator
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Clerk's Office

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Date: January 24, 2022

RE: COVID-19 courthouse protocol --- NECJD Procedural Order

To all counsel and courthouse personnel:

There has been a recent significant upward trend of COVID/Omicron-related cases in Grand Forks County. Our judicial system had returned to full operations to include in-person hearings and trials, with the exception of juvenile and civil pre-trial appearances and guardianship reviews. Those cases continued to be conducted by reliable electronic means for the increased participation that resulted and the time and travel convenience for the parties and counsel.

The Northeast Central Judicial District has assumed its role in ensuring public safety since the start of the pandemic two years ago, and remains flexible to the changing dangers of community spread as a result of its judicial operations. In light of the recent dramatic increase of the infection, the Court will suspend all jury trials until March 1, 2022. All deadlines will remain as scheduled, and all pre-trial hearings will be conducted as scheduled. Jury trials will resume at such date unless the COVID/Omicron cases continue to rise or maintain a high level, at which time the Court extends the suspension period

The increasing number of infected individuals at the Grand Forks County Correctional Center are also a concern, not only in managing its housing, but also in the danger of infection spreading to or from those inmates from their in-person participation in court with the general public. To protect the safety and health of all persons, including the general public, the Court orders all future appearances for GFCCC individuals shall be by Zoom, absent any objection raised by the defendant or his/her counsel. The judges shall ensure any defendant not waiving a REM appearance to be taken separately from the general public appearances, i.e...brought at the end of a session.

All specialty courts --- juvenile and adult drug courts, and domestic violence court --- shall be conducted by Zoom, until the assigned judge determines otherwise, considering the safety of the participants and court personnel.

The following courthouse protocol continues to apply to the Northeast Central Judicial District [NECJD] to ensure the continued safety of all court personnel, attorneys, parties, witnesses, and the general public.

1. Mask wear is discretionary in the courthouse, but subject to COVID-19 exposure and existing spacing requirements as directed by the CDC, the North Dakota Department of Health, the Grand Forks County Commission, and the Grand Forks County Health Department. Those persons who have been in close contact, or are currently exhibiting symptoms, or are known to be asymptomatic, are not to enter the courthouse, and should contact the clerk of court and advise them of their

condition. The assigned judge may direct the court appearance be made by Zoom. If a person wants to pay fines, fees, etc., they should be directed to clerk's office telephone and/or website for instructions.

2. The current spacing requirement as of this date is six feet, unless you are family or related persons. The assigned judge will limit admittance of the general public and non-parties if there is insufficient spacing capacity.
3. Counsel or pro se parties must file exhibits at least five working days prior to the Zoom hearings, and serve a copy on the opposing counsel or pro se party.

SUMMARY:

- A. Civil and criminal jury trials are suspended until March 1, 2022. Further suspension may be necessary if the COVID/Omicron numbers are not at an acceptable level.
- B. Specialty courts will be conducted by Zoom until the assigned judge determines otherwise.
- C. Appearances in criminal court for those at the correctional centers (Grand Forks and Ramsey counties) shall be by Zoom.
- D. All matters currently conducted by Zoom shall continue as such.
- E. Parties and counsel shall appear in-person on all other cases, unless the assigned judge authorizes appearance by REM.



Don Hager
Presiding Judge
Northeast Central Judicial District