

Santa Cruz Superior Court

Schedule for reopening:

June 1: Staff returns to court.

June 8: All criminal court rooms will reopen; Santa Cruz court clerks will resume normal hours; the law library is expected to reopen with limited 8AM-12PM in-person hours.

June 15: Civil court room and family court rooms will reopen; Watsonville court clerks will resume normal hours; the self-help center will resume normal hours.

Precautions that the courts will be taking due to COVID-19

--When entering court, all attorneys clients, witnesses, etc. will have to wear masks.

--Social distancing.

--Hand sanitizers in court.

--Court rooms cleaned twice per day.

--Lots of janitorial staff.

Appearing in Court

--In civil court, the parties are encouraged to appear by court call.

--In criminal court, parties can appear by phone.

--In family court, Judge Marigonda is encouraging (but not requiring) remote participation.

--In juvenile justice court, Judge Guy is requiring that all parties, as well as families, only appear remotely. In-person hearings will be specially set only if necessary.

--The dependency court protocols are still being worked out.

Trials

--Jury trials in the civil setting for 2020 would be "highly unlikely," unless there was an extraordinary need to convene a jury.

--Criminal jury trials will be only for time not waived cases.

--Judge Volkmann is creating a task force to plan out the logistics of how to conduct jury trials in the COVID-19 world. The concerns include: how to get people to respond to jury summons, jury assembly room logistics (the space can only fit 25 socially-distanced people), and only about 20 people can fit in the court room for jury selection. Judge Burdick mentioned working on developing a hardship questionnaire that could be submitted electronically and possibly "for cause responses" also being done remotely.

--For civil case hearings, any court reporter must be physically present in the court room (even if the attorneys and parties are appearing remotely).

Final Notes

Based on the governor's proposed budgets, there will be substantial cuts to the courts. The Santa Cruz County court system is anticipating and working to address those changes.