

Changed court entry conditions during COVID-19

Courts, Tribunals and Service Delivery (CTSD) staff have been working closely with the Heads of Jurisdiction and NSW Health to take all reasonable steps and precautions to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in court buildings. The health and wellbeing of all court users – litigants, legal profession, judges, judicial and registry staff and members of the public and media remains the paramount consideration.

All jurisdictions are reviewing court attendance and have been relaxing some restrictions on attendance in person. However due to physical distancing requirements the use of court houses cannot return to the volume experienced prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Each building is being assessed to ensure that physical distancing requirements are in place. The principles and guidelines adopted are consistent with the advice provided by NSW Health and SafeWork Australia and provide a focus on self-responsibility, physical distance and hygiene.

Some of the measures put in place include:

- temperature testing upon entering court premises
- staggered returns of face-to-face proceedings
- continued availability of virtual courtroom environments
- certain applications to the Court continue to be available via email or in writing mitigating the need for a physical attendance
- additional cleaning regimes particularly in 'high traffic' areas
- hand sanitisers in public areas and within courtrooms,
- floor decals and notices providing reminders of physical distancing
- triaging of matters to reduce the number of people required to come into the court premises
- Protocols for jury trials to recommence for selected jurors and practitioners.

CTSD is seeking the support of legal practitioners to continue to limit the number of people attending and remaining in its buildings. In particular it would be appreciated if practitioners conduct preliminary activities remotely or off site. Practitioners are also reminded not to attend court if they are unwell.

Extensive work is being carried out at the Downing Centre to provide a safer, more efficient procedure to enter through the security screening area. An additional lane specifically dedicated to legal practitioners and staff is currently being installed to reduce the waiting time to move through the screening process. Additionally, practitioners will be able to bring their own plastic bag for all metallic items to place onto the roller beds. This provides a non-contact process of personal items and avoids the need to place items into the trays provided.

CTSD will continue to review our processes and advice from NSW Health to work towards minimising the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and encourage all court users to download the COVID-Safe app and ensure it is active whilst in the court precinct.