

Superior Court frequently asked questions concerning COVID-19

Frequently asked questions about the Superior Court's procedures in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Updated July 12, 2021.

General FAQs

Q. Are the courts open?

Courthouses are open for business but may continue to hear some civil and criminal matters virtually, i.e., by telephone or videoconference, consistent with constitutional, statutory, and other applicable rights.

The following proceedings will be held by videoconference, unless otherwise ordered:

- Reviews of bail decisions
- Reviews of preventive detention orders for dangerousness, under G. L. c. 276, § 58A, where no testimony is taken
- Civil matters involving incarcerated persons, where no evidence is taken

Proceedings in other civil and criminal matters may be held virtually, in the discretion of the judge, where consistent with constitutional, statutory, and other applicable rights, and in consideration of the following factors, among others that may be relevant:

- the nature of the proceeding, including whether it is civil or criminal
- any agreement of the parties or waiver of any right to in-person, physical presence
- any efforts to arrange for the physical presence of a party, witness, or other participant, and, for civil cases, the cost of physical appearance in relation to its importance
- any security or health risks of physical presence in relation to any corresponding risks at the remote site
- any other factors affecting convenience to and safety of the parties and the public

For any videoconference hearing involving a self-represented litigant (SRL) with limited access to, or limited facility with, videoconference technology, the court shall assist the litigant to enable participation by videoconference or shall offer an alternative means of participating virtually.

A “hybrid” proceeding may be held, that is, one consisting of some participants appearing in person and some appearing virtually, on request and in the discretion of the court, and consistent with constitutional, statutory, and other applicable rights. Any participant who requests to appear virtually at an in-person proceeding shall have no grounds to object to any other participant appearing in person.

Public access to virtual proceedings shall be available through designated telephone lines provided on the websites of the Superior Court Clerks' Offices, unless, in a particular case, access is provided by some other means authorized by the court.

See Superior Court Standing Order 4-21: Seventh Updated Protocol Governing Superior Court Operations During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic, effective July 12, 2021 ([S.O. 4-21](#)); Superior Court Standing Order 1-20: Videoconferencing of Court Events, effective February 1, 2020 ([S.O. 1-20](#)).

Q. Who can enter a courthouse and do visitors have to wear masks?

Persons who are fully vaccinated — i.e., for whom at least two weeks have passed since receiving an approved single-dose vaccine or the second dose of a double-dose vaccine — may enter a courthouse **unless** they:

- Have tested positive for COVID-19 within the previous 10 days
- Are awaiting COVID-19 test results after experiencing COVID-19 symptoms
- Were directed to isolate or quarantine
- Currently have COVID-19 symptoms, such as a fever, chills, sore throat, or new symptoms of severe cough, shortness of breath, severe muscle pain, headache, loss of taste or smell, extreme fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, or vomiting

Persons who are **not** fully vaccinated shall **not** enter a courthouse if they:

- Have tested positive for COVID-19 within the previous 10 days
- Are awaiting COVID-19 test results after experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, or after close contact with someone with COVID-19
- Were directed to isolate or quarantine
- Have had COVID-19 symptoms within the previous 14 days, such as a fever, chills, sore throat, or new symptoms of a severe cough, shortness of breath, severe muscle pain, headache, loss of taste or smell, extreme fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, or vomiting
- Have traveled internationally within the previous 14 days
- Have had close contact with someone with COVID-19, within the previous 14 days

If someone is scheduled to appear in court or has an appointment in the courthouse but cannot enter the courthouse because of one or more of the reasons listed above, the person should:

- If the person is represented by an attorney, contact the attorney; or
- If the person has no attorney, call the registry or clerk's office for the court where the person is scheduled to appear or would seek relief; or
- If the person is an attorney and is scheduled to appear before a judge, contact the registry or clerk's office or, if practicable, that session directly by telephone; or
- If the person is scheduled to meet with a probation officer, contact the probation officer or applicable probation office directly by telephone; or
- If the person is a juror sitting on an ongoing trial or grand jury or appearing for empanelment, call the telephone number the person was provided when seated on the jury or summoned for empanelment; or

- If the person is a potential juror appearing for the first day of service, contact the Office of Jury Commissioner; or
- If in doubt as to whom to contact, call the registry or clerk's office for the particular court in which the person was scheduled to appear.

Everyone, whether vaccinated or not, must wear a mask inside a courthouse that covers the nose and mouth (visitors should bring their own masks), except that, during a court proceeding, a judge, in his or her discretion, may allow jurors, attorneys, witnesses or others in a courtroom to take off their masks.

See Supreme Judicial Court fourth order regarding public access to state courthouses & court facilities, effective July 12, 2021 ([SJC-4th Order](#)).

Q. Can I bring a cell phone or other personal electronic device into a courthouse?

Courts allow cell phones and other personal electronic devices (such as computers, tablets, and Bluetooth devices) in courthouses, but users must follow the rules in [Trial Court Administrative Order 21-1: Order Concerning Trial Court Policy on Possession & Use of Cell Phones & Personal Electronic Devices](#), effective June 15, 2021, posted at the entrance to each courthouse.

Q. How can I file something in Superior Court?

Clerks' Offices are open to the public for in-person business. They accept pleadings and other documents by regular mail, by electronic filing or eFiling (in civil cases, in all counties), or, if specifically allowed by a Clerk's Office, by leaving material in a dropbox in the courthouse. To learn whether a Clerk's Office uses a dropbox, or to ask any other question about how to submit materials to a Clerk's Office, contact the specific Clerk's Office — contact information is found on the [Superior Court location contact pages](#); click on the county you are looking for to access contact information.

Q. Can I speak to someone in person at a specific county Clerk's Office?

Clerks' Offices are open to the public for in-person business. Users may call the Clerk's Office during regular court hours, which are posted on each office's contact page, or users may email the office using the address provided on the relevant [Superior Court location contact page](#).

Q. Can I access my case online?

Certain case types listed below can be accessed and viewed via [MassCourts](#).

Civil case types:

- Administrative civil actions
- Actions involving the state or a municipality
- Business litigation

- Civil actions with incarcerated party
- Contract or business cases
- Equitable remedies (e.g., injunctions)
- Miscellaneous civil actions
- Real property
- Sexually Dangerous Person—determination
- Sexually Dangerous Person—exam & discharge
- Torts

Criminal case types:

- Bail petitions*
- Criminal complaints*
- Indictments*
- Legacy SDP (only Suffolk Criminal)*
- Probation transfers*

***Note** — for criminal case types, you must have your exact docket number.

You can find additional information on what can be accessed online, on the [Search Court Dockets, Calendars and Case Information page](#).

Q. What is the status of jury trials and bench trials?

Jury trials have resumed, with the following limitations:

- Priority is given to cases where a criminal defendant, juvenile in a youthful offender case, or petitioner or respondent in a sexually-dangerous-persons case is in custody
- Criminal cases in Superior Court may be tried to juries of 6, instead of juries of 12, with the defendant’s consent (with defense peremptories limited to 4, and the Commonwealth’s peremptories limited to the total number allowed for all defendants)
- Sexually dangerous person cases may be tried to juries of 6, instead of juries of 12, with the consent of all parties (with peremptories limited to 4 for each party)
- Civil cases in Superior court “shall be tried” to juries of 6, instead of juries of 12, with or without the consent of the parties (with peremptories limited to 4 for each party)

Bench trials may be conducted in person or, in the discretion of the trial judge, with the consent of the parties, virtually.

See Supreme Judicial Court seventh updated order regarding court operations under the exigent circumstances created by the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, effective July 12, 2021 ([SJC-7th Order](#)).