

## UPDATE ON STATUS OF CALIFORNIA STATE COURTS AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Updated May 26, 2020

Recent circumstances quite unique to the COVID-19 emergency have forced jurisdictions to adopt new rules or alter existing orders, and in some cases order complete court closures. For insurers and their insureds who may be monitoring potential claims and anticipating filing or trial-related deadlines, this is an important issue.

In California, each county is controlling access to their courthouses in the manner best suited to their specific needs and guidance from medical professions. State courts across the state are implementing a variety of measures to curtail public activity in many instances, and in others to shut down completely. The **California Supreme Court** suspended in-person oral arguments until "deemed prudent to resume normal measures." Here is a look at how courts across California are grappling with the threat of the novel coronavirus as of May 26, 2020.

**ALAMEDA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT** | In a significant step toward restoring services to the public, the **Superior Court of Alameda County** (Court) announced that as of Monday, May 18, 2020, it will resume accepting reservations for all civil, family, and probate motions, with the exception of motions in unlawful detainer proceedings, which remain stayed.

The Court on May 20, 2020, announced a virtual "reopening" on June 1, 2020, "to the extent that court business can be conducted remotely within existing resource and technological limitations." The courts and clerk's offices will generally remain closed physically to the public. However, small claims trials and certain urgent matter hearings will be heard remotely. The rules detail processes for appearing remotely and procedures for civil and criminal matters.

Limited public access to court buildings is being allowed for records searches. Visitors must wear face coverings. The Court is providing audio access to non-confidential proceedings.

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT** | Presiding Judge Kevin C. Brazile on May 13, 2020, extended previous orders closing courtrooms and delaying **Los Angeles County Superior Court** trials and non-essential matters through June 10. Criminal and civil trials and certain other matters scheduled between May 13 and June 10, 2020, will be continued or reset.

The Los Angeles' Clerk's office will reopen on June 15. "Information regarding the new Virtual Clerk's Office and Court Service Departments including virtual **Jury Service**, telephonic and video WebEx assistance, and instruction on how to reserve a seat in the courthouse for in-person assistance, will be coming soon."

The court is preparing to reopen on June 22, 2020, the 400 currently closed courtrooms. Judicial officers, court employees and visitors will be required to wear face coverings.

**ORANGE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT** | According to the notice posted May 1, 2020, civil “trial dates for all trials scheduled to begin as of March 17, 2020, forward will be rescheduled approximately 25 weeks from the currently scheduled trial date, with notice to all parties.” Civil trials that were in progress as of March 17, 2020, will be vacated.

The **Orange County Superior Court** has announced a soft reopening on May 26, 2020. Preliminary hearings in felony matters will begin that day; criminal jury trials will start in June.

Public service windows will remain closed and anyone entering the courthouse will be required to wear a face covering. “Social distancing rules will also be strictly enforced in all facilities, thus the number of individuals entering public courtrooms and elevators will be subject to space limitations.”

**RIVERSIDE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT** | On April 22, 2020, the **Riverside County Superior Court** issued a civil division emergency reorganization order vacating jury and court trials and making other changes to handle civil matters.

On April 24, the Chief Justice signed a fifth emergency order for the court creating procedures for transferring civil cases to other counties for trial. On May 14, the Court extended its general closure through May 29.

The Court, which announced courtroom closures around the county, requires anyone entering a court building to wear a face covering.

**SACRAMENTO COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT** | The **Sacramento County Superior Court** issued an emergency bail schedule on April 13, 2020. The Chief Justice issued a fourth emergency order for the court on May 14. “The Presiding Judge Law & Motion Department will commence re-setting previously-continued hearings to take place beginning Friday, June 5. To reset such hearings, the Court will send the parties notice of the newly-scheduled hearing date and time.” Hearings will be conducted remotely.

Presiding Judge Russell L. Hom on May 15, extended general courthouse closures through June 12.

Some court hearings are being live streamed. Court visitors and employees will have their temperatures taken at court entrances. Effective May 18, 2020, anyone who comes into court through a screening station must wear a face covering.

**SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT** | Presiding Judge Michael A. Sachs issued an 11-page fifth amendment to the **San Bernardino County Superior Court’s** emergency order on April 30, 2020, outlining operations and deadline extensions through May 28. The chief justice issued a third emergency order for the court on April 29.

On May 15, Sachs announced a reduction in clerk’s office hours daily through November 3.

The court is requiring all courthouse visitors to wear face coverings. A separate order requires all judicial officers, court employees and visitors to wear face coverings inside a courthouse.

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT** | An April 3, 2020, order restricts access to county courthouses. The **San Diego County Superior Court** received a fifth emergency order from the Chief Justice on April 29, and Presiding Judge Lorna A. Alksne posted an implementation order on April 30.

On May 13, Judge Alksne signed a general order outlining new procedures for civil cases. The court says it is rescheduling 87,000 hearings postponed due to the pandemic-related closures.

All jury service through May 22, is dismissed. The court is livestreaming certain proceedings as it continues handling only limited matters through May 22.

**SAN FRANCISCO SUPERIOR COURT** | The court received a third emergency order from the **San Francisco Superior Court** Chief Justice on April 10, 2020, declaring the period between April 16 and June 1, 2020, a court holiday for the purposes of filing some papers.

Civil trials scheduled to start between April 16 and June 1 have been vacated and will be rescheduled. Presiding Judge Garrett L. Wong issued an order on April 30, implementing the Chief Justice's relief measures outlined in her April 29, statewide order.

The court closed approximately 75 percent of its courtrooms and clerk's offices. Anyone entering the courthouse must wear a face covering. The court is posting general orders on its website.

**VENTURA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT** | The Chief Justice issued a fourth emergency order for the court on May 11, 2020. **Ventura County Superior Court** Presiding Judge Kent M. Kellegrew issued an administrative order for the court on May 12. The court will limit operations through June 9.

A small number of courtrooms will be operating to hear urgent criminal, juvenile, temporary restraining order issues and emergency ex parte Family Law, Civil and Probate matters only," the court said online.

Litchfield Cavo attorneys are continuously monitoring the complexities and concerns of coronavirus issues. Our attorneys are ready to assist on all COVID-19-related legal matters. To find an attorney who can best analyze your state-specific case and learn how these statutes may impact your filing, please visit [LitchfieldCavo.com/COVID-19](https://LitchfieldCavo.com/COVID-19).

Jamie O. Norman is an attorney in Litchfield Cavo's Pasadena office. His practice includes general liability defense including catastrophic injury and wrongful death claims. He has extensive experience handling toxic tort matters including asbestos defense litigation, construction defect and premises liability. Jamie also assists companies to resolve employment related disputes including wrongful termination, wage-and-hour lawsuits and counsels on human resource issues.

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