

COVID-19: UPDATE

15 January 2021

Courts are continuing to sit during the current six week lockdown (26 December 2020 – 6 February 2021) and the additional measures which came force at midnight on 7 January 2021. [Regulation 6C\(2\)\(j\) of the Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(No.2\) Regulations \(NI\) 2020](#) (as amended) provides that it is a reasonable excuse to travel from home for the purposes of attending court or participating in legal proceedings.

During this period courts will undertake as much business as possible remotely. **Legal representatives and those involved in proceedings should not attend court unless the judge determines in the interests of justice that their physical attendance is absolutely necessary.** Where it is necessary for people to come to court in person such hearings can only take place where it is safe to do so. Judges are sensitive to public health concerns and will be flexible wherever possible in trying to limit in-person hearings to a minimum.

In cases where the physical presence of some participants is necessary, such as jurors in Crown Court trials and inquests or proceedings that are to consider removal of a child, the judge will make a decision based on the individual circumstance of the case as to how it should proceed taking into account the need to minimise footfall. Any case that proceeds with physical attendance will do so with very strict adherence to the public health guidelines. **No individual should attend court unless specifically required to do so by a judge.**

NICTS are reviewing the risk assessments for all courthouses and have issued [revised guidance on the wearing of face coverings in courts and court buildings](#). Safety measures such as social distancing, hand hygiene, ventilation and the use of face coverings must be rigorously adhered to by any persons attending court.

Legal representatives should continue to collaboratively complete and lodge the relevant forms (**HR1, HR2, FCI1**) within the prescribed timeframes in advance of the hearing date so that appropriate arrangements can be made by court staff to manage footfall in courtrooms and public areas of the court building.

Crown Court jury trials are continuing in Laganside Courts, Antrim, Coleraine, Craigavon, Dungannon and Newry. **Civil and family business** will be undertaken remotely as much as possible with court attendance limited to where it is absolutely necessary. Magistrates' Courts will only require attendance where it is necessary in the interests of justice. **Coroners** will commence hearing inquests in the International Convention Centre in Belfast from 18 January 2021.