

JUROR FAQ's

Q: Why is the Court summoning jurors during a pandemic?

A: As the COVID-19 infection rates decreased and there has been an easing up on restrictions, Berks County Courts have resumed jury trials. We recognize that victims of crime and those accused of crimes have a Constitutional right to have those accusations addressed by a trial by jury.

Q: What steps are being taken to ensure health and safety standards?

A: The Court takes public health and safety seriously. Jurors will be spread out to maintain social distancing guidelines. Frequent cleaning and sanitizing protocols are in place. Access to certain common areas and amenities (coffee maker, refrigerators, water coolers) will be restricted.

Q: Are masks being provided to jurors?

A: We ask all jurors to bring their own masks, as they are required before you arrive at the Courthouse. However, if a juror arrives without a mask, one will be provided. If a juror's mask malfunctions in any way (e.g. strap breaks) a replacement will be provided.

Q: Should I bring my own lunch?

A: Jurors are welcome to bring their own lunch. Breakfast and lunch items are available for purchase from the Courthouse cafeteria.

Q: How many other people will I be grouped with?

A: For jury selection, there will be up to 55 jurors, plus those in Court with them (Judge, attorneys, defendant, etc.) This would occur in a very large auditorium, so all will be spread out. For trial, only large courtrooms will be used, and jurors will be at least six feet apart from all other persons at all times. Large rooms will be utilized during jury deliberation rather than the traditional jury deliberation rooms.

Q: Does the Governor's prohibition on indoor events and gatherings of more than 25 people apply to the judiciary or court functions, such as jury selection and trials?

A: Per the Pennsylvania Department of Health – "No. The court system, acting principally through its judicial districts, is responsible for taking the necessary actions to protect the safety of court staff, court users, judges and the public, guided by general CDC and Department of Health recommendations. The Judiciary is working to protect public health while ensuring that individuals retain their fundamental state and federal constitutional rights to trial by jury. To that end, the Department of Health assisted the judiciary in developing recommended guidelines designed to ensure that jury selection and jury trials can be conducted safely."

Q: What if I am unable to serve as a juror?

A: Pennsylvania Law allows for exemption from jury duty. Valid exemptions include but are not limited to: (1) persons in active military service, and (2) persons who demonstrate undue hardship or extreme inconvenience. If you have any questions regarding exemption from jury duty, please contact Jury Services, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., by calling (610) 478-6401 or emailing jury@countyofberks.com. Please include your juror number and name, as well as the date of possible jury duty.

Q: What if I am a “high risk” individual?

A: Jurors who are defined by the Centers for Disease Control as at-risk if they contract the virus will be released from reporting for jury duty, if requested. The requests will be granted over the phone and these prospective jurors will not be required to report. The CDC defines at-risk people as anyone over age 60 or people with underlying health conditions.

Jurors who are considered high or medium risk for exposure to the COVID-19 virus should contact Jury Services and may be directed by phone to not report. At this point, this is defined by the CDC as someone who has traveled outside the United States within the last 14 days or anyone with direct contact to a person diagnosed with the virus in the last 14 days, or has a high probability of having the virus but that has not been confirmed by a test.

Q: What if I fail (refuse) to appear without explanation?

A: A Judge has many options to address failure to appear including contempt. However, our Judges are certainly aware of the current health situation. Please contact Jury Services, rather than fail to appear without explanation.

Q: What if I have symptoms of illness?

A: If you have any symptoms of illness, please DO NOT report. However, you must contact jury staff as soon as possible. See ‘What if I am Unable to Serve’ (above).