

Coming to Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service buildings during COVID-19 What you need to know and what you need to do May 2022

All court and tribunal buildings and the Office of the Public Guardian are open for business. The range of business that will be dealt with on our premises may vary during the pandemic – based on the public health advice in place at the time.

We are asking all users, staff and judiciary to **respect each others' personal space when on our premises** – to help maintain a safe environment for everyone. We also **request that you wear a face covering whilst on our premises**.

Our [baseline safety measures](#) remain in place including enhanced cleaning and ventilation. **You will still be required to wear a face covering whilst in a court or tribunal hearing room.**

Current advice on when you should stay at home and not attend SCTS premises due to a confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 can be found on the Scottish Government [website](#) and NHS inform [website](#).

We ask for your assistance in minimising the risk of infection to those attending our buildings. Scottish Government guidance now places a stronger emphasis on each of us taking responsibility for keeping ourselves and others safe. Please exercise that responsibility, respect others' personal space and follow both this guidance and any instructions given to you by SCTS staff.

1. Safety in court and tribunal buildings

We keep this guidance updated to reflect changing circumstances and updates to both Government and Public Health Scotland advice.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Detailed risk assessments are carried out in all of our buildings, and a range of additional health and safety measures remain in place. The risk assessments have been developed in consultation with PCS, the Union representing SCTS staff, and are based on a comprehensive [risk assessment framework](#).

The measures in place across our premises are designed to reduce the risk of transmission and infection. We all need to take responsibility to support these measures – in particular respecting each others' personal space when moving around our buildings.

The safety arrangements you will find in our buildings include:

- Clear signage promoting respect for each others' personal space, a request to wear a face covering and reminders about the importance of good hand

hygiene.

- Signage in particular areas to encourage safe distancing and the avoidance of overcrowding – in busy areas and in smaller rooms such as toilets/refreshment areas.
- Ensuring desks and other furniture are laid out to make best use of space and to minimise the potential for creation of pinch points or crowded areas.

If you require further information please speak to a member of SCTS staff.

ON ARRIVAL

We ask that you observe the following arrangements on arrival:

- Where security officers are present, they may carry out a 'hands off' bag search. You will need to open your bag and place items in a tray, so that security officers can check you are not carrying any items you're not allowed to take in, such as sharp objects or work tools. You may be asked to empty the items into a tray and step back. Trays are cleaned between users. If you do not agree to the search, you will be asked to leave the building.
- Please respect the personal space of others who are around you at all times, such as when queueing and upon entering and moving around the building. This may mean waiting outside until you are called to enter.
- Please follow any instructions given to you by SCTS staff.

Hand Hygiene

- Good hand hygiene remains a key protection. We have ensured that good hand-washing and sanitising facilities are available at all premises.
- Frequent handwashing is essential and we will ensure that handwashing facilities are easily available. If any supplies are running low, please bring this to the attention of a member of staff.
- Hand sanitiser is available in waiting areas, inside courts and hearing rooms and in other places where it may be difficult to wash your hands. If you prefer you are welcome to bring your own. You may be asked to demonstrate that it is not harmful by applying some to your hands.

2. FACE COVERINGS

We continue to request that you wear a face covering whilst on SCTS premises. Face coverings must still be used by all parties in the courtroom unless they are presenting to the court, are unable to wear one due to an exemption, or for reasons determined by the bench.

Please bring your own face covering with you. If necessary, disposable face coverings will be available.

3. Cleanliness and hygiene measures in SCTS buildings

What are the arrangements for cleaning in SCTS buildings?

An enhanced daily cleaning regime is in place in all SCTS buildings to ensure that cleaning standards are maintained across our estate.

Our regular cleaning standards remain enhanced to ensure they comply with both the British Institute of Cleaning Science standard and the Public Health Scotland requirements for combatting risk of transmission of COVID-19. All cleaning agents used on SCTS premises contain both active detergent and disinfectant properties – to ensure that our daily cleaning regime meets the levels required for “environmental decontamination” set out in public health guidance. By cleaning to this standard, facilities are kept COVID-safe on a daily basis.

In addition to these enhanced daily cleaning measures we have introduced additional daytime cleaners, carrying out additional touchpoint cleans throughout the day with extra attention on hand-washing basins and toilet facilities.

Please raise any concerns in relation to cleaning or supplies with any member of SCTS staff.

Should I be concerned about handling documents or case papers?

Where possible the exchange of documents will be made via electronic means to reduce handling. In the court environment, it is not always possible to eliminate the handling and sharing of papers. Whilst the available evidence indicates that the risk of transmission from paper is low, care should be exercised when passing any papers from one person to another. Particular attention should be paid to hand hygiene when you are handling papers. In common with other touch points you should avoid touching your face until you have washed or sanitised your hands.

Should I be concerned about using court rooms or a witness stand – these are used by more than one person?

Court rooms and witness stands are cleaned as part of our enhanced cleaning regime described above. It will not always be possible for these to be fully cleaned between each use – which is the case for a range of touch point areas in all buildings and public transport. For this reason we encourage a robust hand hygiene regime when using these areas, including:

- Washing or sanitising hands before entering and when leaving the court room
- Avoid touching hard surfaces where it is not necessary to do so.
- Anti-bacterial wipes will be available.
- Where possible additional cleaning of these areas will take place during the day (e.g. at lunch time).
- Respect each others’ personal space when entering, moving around and exiting the court room.

How will shared equipment be sanitised between users?

We will make sure personal sanitising wipes are available for items such as TV remote controls, keypads for doors and any shared equipment to ensure they can be wiped before and after use. In common with other touch points you should avoid touching your face until you have washed or sanitised your hands.

How is capacity managed in toilet and lift facilities?

We will ensure there is adequate signage to encourage safe distancing and the avoidance of overcrowding in areas such as toilets and lifts.

4. Supporting accused persons at court

CLIENT CONSULTATIONS ON COURT PREMISES

Minimising face to face meetings within court buildings reduces the risks of transmission. Whilst physical distancing restrictions have been removed we request that, where possible, consultations should continue to take place outwith the court estate. There may be occasions where it is not possible to consult or take instructions in advance of the day of a court hearing. Where required prior to a court hearing, we will aim to support local arrangements.

How do solicitors confer with a client in the custody suite?

This will depend on the building. Where possible, we will provide facilities so that legal professionals can communicate remotely (by secure phone or other secure device) with an accused in a custody suite. We will encourage the use of the secure custodial interview room which has physical segregation available.

In custody areas, we have worked with GeoAmey and the Scottish Prison Service monitors to ensure that safe working arrangements are in place. GeoAmey will ensure that visits are conducted safely and practically within the confines of the custody suite. Sanitising products are available for individual use in these areas. Arrangements to allow solicitors to represent clients remotely can be put in place on request.

5. Arrangements for witnesses at court

We work continually with those who cite witnesses to ensure they are only asked to come to court on days when they are needed. COPFS has advice for witnesses on their website and if you are appearing as a defence or civil witness you should seek instruction from the solicitor who asked you to attend.

If you need to attend court you will be shown to a waiting room. Please respect the space of all those using the waiting room so that we can maintain as safe an environment as possible. Drinking water will be available and some of our locations have refreshment facilities. Please bring anything that you think you might need e.g. bottled water, light refreshments and reading material.

Are witnesses allowed to bring anyone with them?

Whilst physical distancing restrictions have been lifted in our buildings, it remains important that we take steps to minimise the number of people in areas which can become congested. We ask therefore that you limit those accompanying you to those you would regard as essential.

6. Arrangements for jurors

Jurors are asked to attend a remote jury centre (RJC). These have been specifically designed to allow jury trials to operate safely and they have the same baseline measures as all of our other buildings. Jurors will be provided with the relevant information and guidance on their attendance in advance of the case in which they are involved.

Further information for jurors can be found at <https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/coming-to-court/jurors>.

7. Ventilation in SCTS buildings

What kind of ventilation is being used in court and tribunal buildings? Is air conditioning safe to use in court and tribunal buildings?

Pre-opening checks were carried out on all our ventilation systems to ensure they are working correctly. All SCTS premises that have mechanical ventilation systems have had their re-circulation and/or thermal wheel systems disabled so that they are currently operating on full fresh air only.

Ensuring that our building ventilation system air handling units are circulating 100% clean fresh air at this point in time is a key safety measure, but it makes it more difficult to regulate temperature – so please consider clothing to suit a range of temperatures. You may be aware of the sound of the fans in quiet areas. Desk fans and air cooling units may be used in ventilated environments in order to provide additional cooling or airflow where appropriate – their use is managed in line with the relevant guidance.

Should we encounter a prolonged period of sub-zero temperatures resulting in us being unable to meet our minimum thermal comfort levels the official guidance permits the re-use of thermal wheels and introduction of some recirculation to achieve comfort conditions. This has not been required to date and we will endeavour to ensure this is only used as a method of last resort.

In venues and rooms where ventilation systems are not installed we will ensure windows and doors are opened appropriately to promote air circulation. Regular CO₂ monitoring is conducted across our estate to ensure that ventilation levels meet or exceed the standards required.

We have ensured that the arrangements in our buildings meet the standards set out in the Scottish Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19): ventilation guidance.

Will the arrangements you have in place be effective if users are inside the same room for several hours at a time?

We are maintaining enhanced ventilation as has been the case throughout the pandemic, in order to minimise the risk of transmission. Combined with the measures we have in place to encourage face coverings and to respect each others' personal space, this creates the safest environment possible. Where appropriate, we are scheduling cases to time slots, to manage the length of time users will be within the building.

8. Food and drink

Is food and drink available in court and tribunal buildings?

The majority of our catering facilities have now reopened, however you may wish to bring food or bottled water with you for your visit. You will be able to take bottled water into the court or hearing room and we encourage you bring your own reusable bottle - although bottled water will be available in courtrooms.

9. Business proceeding remotely and online

Fines can be paid online, by telephone and in person at public counters. We continue to use remote and virtual hearings where appropriate. Guidance for virtual court participants is available at: <https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/coming-to-court/virtual-courts>

10. If you have a concern

If you see something that's not right, please tell a member of staff as soon as possible so that they can take appropriate action. We all want the court environment to be as safe as possible – by working together, respecting each others' personal space and observing the measures that are in place.

Updated 29 April 2022