

Today I am issuing administrative orders to end health screenings required for entry to courthouses and to terminate the general requirement that masks be worn throughout courthouses in the state. The requirements for masking and social distancing during in-person court proceedings will remain in force for now.

As you know, for more than a year we have taken steps to safely operate the judicial branch using safeguards dictated by changing health conditions and evolving best practices. The changes I make today reflect the current state of the pandemic while maintaining appropriate safeguards as we move toward the time when all Floridians eligible for vaccination will have had the opportunity to become fully vaccinated.

Throughout the pandemic, our courts have remained very much in business — doing the work of justice in new and innovative ways. Remote technology has enabled courts to resolve many cases and to move many more cases toward resolution. I am deeply grateful to all the judges, court system staff, and our justice system partners who have continued to serve the people of Florida and have adapted to the challenges of operating in the difficult environment created by the pandemic.

From the beginning, we have been keenly focused on working to prevent unreasonable threats to the health of individuals who are required to participate in court proceedings. But now the widespread ready availability of highly effective vaccines is dramatically changing the context in which we are operating. Because of that widespread availability of highly effective vaccines, almost everyone has available the free means to protect themselves.

Beyond the changes that I am now making that affect courthouse operations outside of in-person court proceedings, I expect that in the not-too-distant future modifications of the protocols now in place for in-person court proceedings will be adopted so that we can move our court rooms back to more normal operations.

As I am sure you are aware, despite our best efforts a serious backlog of cases has developed during the pandemic. This is largely attributable to the great difficulty we've had in conducting jury trials under the constraints imposed by the pandemic. We are now marshaling resources and putting in place strategies to help address this backlog as quickly as possible as our capacity to conduct jury trials increase and ultimately returns to pre-pandemic levels.

As we move forward, remote technology will continue to be an important tool for our system of justice as we strive to make our courts as effective and accessible as possible.

Thank you for your commitment to the work of justice during this last year.
And thank you for your patience as we together go through the various stages
of the transition that is ahead of us.