



# Jury Trials

## STATEMENT FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT AND CHIEF JUDGE OF THE COUNTY COURT

**Monday, 15 June, 2020**

The Supreme Court and the County Court (the Courts) decided to suspend new jury trials from Monday, 16 March, in light of public health advice and in the best interests of the Victorian community.

The Courts are pleased to announce that, as the public health advice has allowed the resumption of several everyday activities within the community, a limited number of Melbourne-based criminal jury trials will be resuming in a measured way from 20 July 2020.

The Courts will continue to monitor developments between now and then and adjust that timeframe if that becomes necessary.

Over the past few months the Courts have been working on plans for the safe resumption of jury trials. The Courts have consulted with health professionals, the legal profession and others involved with criminal trials. That planning has also been informed by work being done in other States and other countries.

Jury trials will resume with a range of measures in place including:

- avoiding the need for the physical gathering of large jury pools
- physical distancing arrangements within courtrooms and jury rooms
- procedural changes to minimise the need for handling of objects
- frequent cleaning of high touch surfaces and other hygiene measures

Government has introduced modifications to jury procedures which support these measures.

Jury summonses will start to be sent to potential jurors in coming weeks. They will be accompanied by advice about the measures that will be in place and procedures for those whose personal circumstances may mean they ask to defer their jury service or be excused.

The Courts will continue to use technology for some other hearings to keep the number of people physically coming to court low and to accommodate the physical needs of criminal jury trials.

Judges and lawyers have adapted very quickly to virtual hearings in a range of criminal and civil matters. In particular, for those short hearings before a matter gets to trial there are real benefits in continuing this practice.

The Courts will closely monitor the resumption of jury trials with a view to the safety and wellbeing of all court users. Work will also continue on planning for the resumption of civil jury trials, and criminal and civil trials in regional areas, in due course.

**Quotes from Chief Justice Anne Ferguson and Chief Judge Peter Kidd:**

*"We are pleased that we are reaching the point where we can safely resume a number of criminal jury trials."*

*"Jury trials will look a little different, but their essential role in our criminal justice system will remain unchanged."*

*"Central to this plan has been ensuring that we can provide a comfortable environment for jurors and all court users, consistent with measures being adopted across the community, as we return to more everyday activities."*

*"The Courts thank all participants for the cooperative approach to developing these plans."*

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