

# News Release



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## **New Jersey Courts Set to Resume Jury Trials**

New Jersey courts are set to resume jury trials beginning next week after being suspended for more than six months because of Covid-19, under a [Supreme Court order released today](#).

The first trial is scheduled to begin in Bergen County on Monday, Sept. 21 with virtual jury selection before Superior Court Judge Robert Vinci. Jury selection will be conducted using a hybrid approach. Voir dire questioning will primarily take place in a virtual format, with technology provided by the Judiciary as needed. Follow-up questioning and the exercise of peremptory challenges will be conducted in person.

The trial will be conducted in a socially distanced courtroom.

“The decision to resume a limited number of jury trials is motivated by the ongoing restrictions of the rights of criminal defendants, including more than 2,500 defendants who have been indicted and are detained in jail awaiting trial, as well as the rights of victims of crime seeking access to the courts to complete a critical step in their recovery,” [said the court in an order signed by Supreme Court Chief Justice Stuart Rabner](#). “In addition, the extended delay in the administration of civil justice, including more than 9,000 cases awaiting trial today, also compels the resumption of jury trials.”

More than 200 potential jurors will be questioned virtually over the first several days. A smaller group of prospective jurors will appear at the Bergen County Courthouse in Hackensack on Monday, Sept. 28. New Jersey’s first socially distant, in-person jury trial is expected to begin that same week.

The preparation to return to jury trials already has resulted in the settlement of 10 criminal cases in Bergen County.

“Jury trials are the catalyst for resolving cases, both in criminal and civil matters. The availability of a judge and jury ready to hear a case prompts pleas in criminal matters and settlements in civil cases. In contrast, the unavailability of jury trials removes the impetus for case resolution and stalls the wheels of justice. Countless individuals are adversely affected as a result,” the Court said in its order.

Virtual jury selection is expected to start soon in Atlantic County the week of Sept. 28, Cumberland County the week of Oct. 5 and Mercer and Passaic counties the week of Oct. 19.

To the extent feasible, the first new jury trials will be straightforward criminal cases involving a single detained defendant. The first several socially distanced in-person jury trials will be livestreamed to the public.

“For more than six months, the New Jersey courts have sustained court operations to the greatest extent possible without jury trials. During that time, public health authorities have confirmed that Covid-19 trends in New Jersey no longer require all residents to stay at home, and those same authorities have issued guidance for how businesses, schools, and other institutions including the courts can safely resume some level of in-person activity. Guided by the public health experts and recognizing its duty to uphold the rule of law even when it is difficult to do so, the Court authorized the resumption of jury trials,” the Court said in its order.

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