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MEDIA RELEASE

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COVID-19: EXPANDED JURIES FOR SHORTER TRIALS

The Supreme and District Courts can now order up to three additional jurors in criminal trials estimated to run four weeks or longer, under an amended regulation to the *Jury Act 1977* to allow trials to continue if a juror falls ill.

Attorney General Mark Speakman said the amendment to the Jury Regulation 2015 is necessary to address potential increases in juror absences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Preventing any further delays to Supreme and District Court trials is a priority. Allowing the flexibility of an expanded jury for shorter trials is a practical measure to ensure there are fewer disruptions to the delivery of justice,” Mr Speakman said.

If jurors get sick or display common symptoms of COVID-19, this amendment will increase the likelihood there will be sufficient jurors at the conclusion of the trial to consider its verdict.

The amendment reduces the estimated trial duration where a court could empanel additional jurors from longer than three months to more than four weeks.

“Additional jurors will not be ordered for every trial with an estimate of four weeks or more. The amendment gives the Supreme and District Courts the ability to consider the necessity for additional jurors on a case-by-case basis,” Mr Speakman said.

If more than 12 jurors remain at the end of the hearing, a ballot is drawn to determine which 12 will participate in the deliberations.

The courts have worked with NSW Health and the Sheriff of NSW Tracey Hall to ensure jurors are kept safe and health measures including social distancing are implemented.

“Juror seating arrangements in courtrooms have been modified to accommodate the additional jurors. Potential jurors are advised before the hearing that they should not attend court if they are unwell. They’re also told that Sheriff Officers conduct health checks at court premises,” Mr Speakman said.

Jury trials were suspended from 16 March until 15 June due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new regulation will commence on the day it is published on the [NSW Legislation website](#).