



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH
SECRETARY

March 20, 2020

Dear Hospital and Ambulatory Surgery Center Leaders:

With increasing cases of COVID-19 and a rapidly evolving situation, North Carolina must be very strategic about the use of medical resources, specifically ventilators and personal protective equipment, to ensure our health care system is able to continue the strong response efforts that are underway across the state. While the course of COVID-19 is not yet determined, we must ensure we are doing everything to be fully prepared to meet the uncertain demands ahead.

Many of you have talked to me about the need for our state to suspend, what we commonly refer to as “non-time sensitive (elective)” surgeries. Multiple health systems across the state have already begun rescheduling non-essential surgeries, procedures, and ambulatory appointments. This is a critical strategy to help support our health care workers and conserve scarce resources as we respond to this pandemic. Thank you to those who have already taken this proactive step in your institutions.

Effective March 23rd, 2020, as part of a unified response, I request all hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers suspend all elective and non-urgent procedures and surgeries. Elective and non-urgent procedures and surgeries are defined as any procedure or surgery that if not done within the next 4 weeks would not cause harm to the patient. Beginning today, March 20th, hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers should institute an explicit, real-time review of all non-time sensitive procedures and surgeries.

We recognize the hardship this may cause and are committed to work with all partners on the impacts this may cause. We will be standing up a working group specific to our rural hospitals to ensure we are addressing their unique needs and concerns. Additionally, we are committed to reviewing this recommendation on a weekly basis and will be working to restore normal activities as quickly as possible.

We recognize this marks a significant shift in operations, particularly for our ambulatory surgical centers throughout the state. These centers are an essential part of our health care continuum and that will not change in light of this announcement. We will be working with you closely on continuity of operations and helping to think creatively on how to support response efforts in this ever-changing situation. We ask that ambulatory surgery centers engage with their local hospital partners on a supply and equipment sharing strategies to ensure we maintain supply for urgent and emergent cases.

Thank you again for all the tireless work you are doing to serve communities across the state. Your efforts are invaluable to the safety and wellbeing of all North Carolinians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mandy K. Cohen".

Mandy K. Cohen, MD, MPH
Secretary