

Issue Brief

Postponing Elective Procedures to Increase COVID-19 Healthcare Capacity

March 23, 2020 (Updated as of 3 p.m. ET)

OVERVIEW

The rapid spread of COVID-19 in the United States indicates an imminent surge of health facility visits that could overwhelm the U.S. healthcare system. In preparation for this influx of patients, jurisdictions and institutions can start applying crisis standards of care (CSC) principles, which encourage suspending or postponing non-emergency or elective procedures in order to devote staff, time, supplies, and other resources to COVID-19 cases. Below are recent state policy actions, contextualized considerations, and resources to inform future policy decisions.

STATE POLICY ACTIONS

Several states have already taken action to suspend or postpone elective surgeries. Examples include:

- The governors of **Arizona** and **Colorado** issued executive orders halting all elective surgeries.
- The governor of **New Jersey** issued an [executive order](#) suspending all adult elective surgeries and adult elective invasive procedures.
- The **Massachusetts** Department of Public Health issued an [order](#) for hospitals to cancel non-essential elective procedures.
- The **Illinois** Department of health has [recommended](#) “cancelling all elective surgeries and procedures.”

CONSIDERATIONS

- Apply [CSC principles](#), which encourage suspending or postponing non-emergency or elective procedures.
- Encourage healthcare organizations to review the [Elective Surgery Acuity Scale](#) from the American College of Surgeons to assist in triage and decision making.
- Use lessons-learned from previous surge events and current predictions for healthcare and ICU surge capacity to inform decision-making.
- [Develop FAQs](#) for patients, caregivers, and healthcare personnel about the suspension of elective procedures.

RESOURCES

- [Duty to Plan: Health Care, Crisis Standards of Care, and Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2](#). National Academy of Medicine. March 2, 2020.
- [CMS Adult Elective Surgery and Procedures Recommendations](#). March 15, 2020.
- [CDC Resources for Clinics and Healthcare Facilities](#). March 16, 2020.
- [FAQ: Executive Order Delaying Elective Medical Procedures](#). Minnesota Department of Health. March 19, 2020.
- [Guidance for Triage of Non-Emergent Surgical Procedures](#). American College of Surgeons. March 17, 2020

For questions, feedback, or follow-up questions, please email preparedness@astho.org.