Arkansas Department of Health

4815 West Markham Street • Little Rock, Arkansas 72205-3867 • Telephone (501) 661-2000
Governor Asa Hutchinson
Nathaniel Smith, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health

Effective April 27, 2020

Directive on Resuming Elective Procedures

The Secretary of Health, in consultation with the Governor, has sole authority over all instances of quarantine, isolation, and restrictions on commerce and travel throughout Arkansas, as necessary and appropriate to control disease in the state of Arkansas as authorized by Ark. Code Ann. §20-7-109--110. Based on available scientific evidence, it is necessary and appropriate to take further action to ensure that COVID-19 remains controlled and that residents and visitors in Arkansas remain safe.

On April 3, 2020, the Secretary of Health, in consultation with Governor Asa Hutchinson, issued a directive that elective procedures in the state would cease. The directive went into detail regarding considerations and exemptions. The Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) has developed requirements for the resumption of elective procedures, so that surgical facilities could perform elective procedures based on a decrease in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations.

This directive emphasizes the need for facilities to understand their capabilities (e.g., beds, testing, ORs) as well as potential constraints (e.g. workforce, supply chain), while watching for possible subsequent waves of the virus, which may require a return to prior restrictions. Elective procedures shall be limited as follows:

1. Only outpatients with no plans for overnight stay.
2. An American Society of Anesthesiologists rating of I or II. If they are a II-rating, their disease process should be well controlled.
3. No contact with known COVID-19 patients during the past 14 days.
4. Patients must be asymptomatic for COVID-19 per ADH guidelines.
5. Start with a small initial volume of cases and increase incrementally as PPE availability and number of statewide occurrences dictate.
6. Each institution must have an ample supply of PPE for resuming elective procedures while maintaining a reserve should there be a resurgence of the virus. The acquisition of PPE is a matter for each institution to address and is not the responsibility of ADH.
7. For an asymptomatic patient to be a candidate for a procedure, he/she must have at least one negative COVID-19 NAAT test within 48 hours prior to the beginning of the procedure.

These requirements pertain to all elective procedures, including dental, eye, nasopharyngeal, chest surgery, and colonoscopy. Small rural hospitals under 60 beds and critical access hospitals, though strongly advised to follow this directive to maximize resources and minimize risk, are excluded from this directive. The April 3, 2020 directive's exemptions for medically necessary procedures to preserve a patient's life or health also remain in effect.

This directive was developed with input from the Arkansas Chapter of the American College of Surgeons.