

## Virginia Hospital Center Resumes Elective Procedures

The governor's stay on non-emergency procedures has been lifted. Time to schedule that colonoscopy or cardiac workup.

May 8, 2020

[Lisa Lednicer](#)



Artur Tumasjan on Unsplash

If you've been putting off an important diagnostic test or surgery because of the coronavirus, doctors at [Virginia Hospital Center](#) urge you to go ahead and schedule it now that Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam has given hospitals the green light to resume elective medical procedures.

For certain patients, COVID-19 is not the only threat. Left undetected or untreated, conditions such as heart disease can get worse, says Rohit Modak, chair of Virginia Hospital Center's infectious diseases department. "What could have been considered an elective procedure has now become a semi-urgent

procedure," he says. "We can provide a safe environment for health care."

The Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association estimates that about 15,000 nonurgent inpatient and outpatient medical procedures were canceled each week during the governor's ban, which went into effect on March 25.

With the lifting of the ban as of May 1, doctors can now resume non-emergency surgeries and procedures such as colonoscopy, upper endoscopy, cardiac catheterization, cataract surgery and knee replacement.

Physicians note that the term "elective" is a misnomer; people may associate it with things like tummy tucks and eye lifts, but it really refers to medical procedures that improve quality of life.

Virginia Hospital Center, like many other hospitals across the country, saw a drop in patients over the past eight weeks. The hospital is licensed for 394 beds, and about 340 of those were full before the governor's moratorium went into effect, says chief medical officer and senior vice president Jeffrey DiLisi.

Once the suspension began, the number of admitted patients dipped by about two-thirds.

Now, the hospital is nearly full again as doctors have resumed scheduling procedures like colonoscopies and hip and knee replacements.

DiLisi says he expects the number of other elective procedures to ramp up quickly.

“Surgeons are eager to get back to work, and some patients are anxious to get their issues fixed,” he says. “It was a prudent move to put a brake on everything, but now people need their treatment.”

Is it safe? DiLisi says that between 20 percent and 30 percent of admitted patients have COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, but the hospital has strict protocols in place to protect patients who are there for other reasons.

All who walk through the door—including patients, staff and limited visitors—have their temperatures taken, Modak says. All patients are asked if they’ve had COVID-19 or if they are experiencing symptoms, such as shortness of breath or coughing.

If a patient arriving for an elective procedure is found to have a fever, he or she is asked to return home and follow up with the doctor. Admitted patients are issued masks, and all hospital personnel wear masks and personal protective equipment. DiLisi says there are sufficient supplies of PPE for staff.

Prior to surgery, every surgical patient is tested for coronavirus, with results available within 45 minutes. If a patient is found to have the virus, doctors won’t operate.

For community members with symptoms, the hospital continues to operate an off-campus, drive-through sample collection site at 1429 N. Quincy Street in Arlington. Individuals seeking COVID-19 testing must have a written order from a licensed healthcare provider.

“I think it’s safer to go to the hospital right now than to go to the supermarket,” DiLisi says. “Supermarkets probably don’t look at protective measures the same way hospitals do.”