

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
Elective Surgeries/Procedures/Diagnostic Testing

April 27, 2020

GENERAL

Why is the hospital resuming elective surgeries/procedures/diagnostic testing while we still have COVID-19 cases?

Patient and caregiver safety are our number one priority. We care about your ongoing health needs and want to assure we are fully prepared to care for you while you are at Covenant Health. This means we have reviewed our personal protective equipment (PPE) needs for your procedure and are confident we can safely care for you.

As a result of the cancellations or delays, we are seeing an increase in patients who have an immediate need for a surgical procedure and face deteriorating health if the procedure is further delayed. At the same time, we currently have adequate capacity within our hospital and feel confident that we can safely care for additional patients who need an essential procedure.

Is the hospital prepared?

Our hospitals are ready to care for you. From the beginning of this crisis, we have isolated positive or suspected COVID-19 patients from other non-COVID related patients, including in our emergency departments.

All caregivers undergo a health screening each day prior to beginning their work. Our caregivers come to work each day knowing we have created a safe environment for them and for you.

In addition, caregivers who support elective surgeries/procedures/diagnostic testing are different than those who care for COVID-19 positive patients. Our caregivers are always prepared to care for you and your health needs.

What precautions is the hospital taking to ensure patients having a procedure are not exposed to the COVID-19 virus?

The safety of our patients and caregivers is our number one priority. That's why we have implemented a strict, multi-layer process to ensure the safety of patients receiving care within our hospital:

- *Limited visitor policy (only 1 visitor, with exceptions for end-of-life, minors, NICU parents)*
- *Health Screenings:*
 - *All caregivers are encouraged to self-screen before coming to work. If they are experiencing any symptoms, they must call their supervisor and stay home.*
 - *Everyone entering the hospital (caregivers, doctors, visitors, **everyone**) is screened for fever. Anyone with a fever will be sent home.*

- *If anyone develops symptoms while at work, they will alert their supervisor, contact caregiver health and go home under self-quarantine.*
- *From the beginning, we have isolated COVID-19 positive patients to one area of the hospital. This keeps the rest of the hospital protected from direct exposure, including separating suspected positive patients in our emergency departments. The majority of COVID-19 positive patients under Covenant's care are being treated and monitored on an outpatient basis. Currently, COVID-19 positive patients make up less than 3% of all hospitalized patients in the Covenant system.*
- *Implementing measures that ensure we meet social distancing directives.*
- *Public area masking – we have encouraged all caregivers to wear appropriate masks while in public areas of the hospital.*
- *Patient care settings – strict guidelines have been implemented to protect our patients and caregivers when being in a patient care setting.*

Will I be tested for COVID-19 before my surgery?

Yes. All patients scheduled for a surgical procedure will be required to have a COVID-19 test as part of your pre-operative work-up. In addition, our caregivers are following every precaution to ensure your safety using appropriate personal protective equipment.

Some news reports state that we have not yet hit the surge of COVID-19 cases. If this is true, will the hospital have capacity to support an increase in COVID-19 cases if they begin conducting surgical cases?

Yes. Our hospitals on average are less than 50% of normal capacity. In addition, we have developed a plan that will allow us to increase our capacity up to 140% if necessary. We will also be monitoring our personal protective equipment (PPE) inventory levels and pharmaceutical needs daily. Should we see a significant shift in any of these areas, we will immediately adjust scheduled procedures.

We are still encouraged to stay at home. Doesn't scheduling procedures conflict with this?

No. The Governor of Texas recently issued an executive order that allows for hospitals to resume normal operations if certain criteria are met. After reviewing the Governor's order, we have determined we can provide care in a safe environment. This means adhering to strict safety protocols, limiting visitors and continuing to practice social distancing guidelines. We are confident we can continue to care for patients with COVID-19, as well as those who need immediate/urgent care.

Where will my surgery/procedure/diagnostic test take place?

All hospitals within Covenant Health are fully operational and prepared to care for you. Your physician will schedule your procedure at the location best suited to care for your health needs.

My employment status and insurance has changed since my surgery/procedure/diagnostic test was cancelled or postponed. Can I still reschedule?

We understand your concern. Your physician will work with you to reschedule your appointment. Unfortunately, you will need to go through the pre-certification again because time has elapsed since the prior approval.

Will patients be screened for COVID-19 symptoms when entering the hospital?

Yes. Patients will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms, including fever, when coming into the hospital. If a patient has any positive symptoms, they will be given a mask and escorted to a designated area. Patients screening positive upon entry will be rescheduled unless care is deemed emergent by their physician.

Can a patient bring a visitor to the hospital?

If the patient is having a same-day procedure, they can bring one visitor. If the patient will be admitted post procedure, one visitor will be allowed every 24-hour period.

Will the patient's visitor be screened for COVID-19?

Yes. The visitor will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms, including fever, when entering the hospital. If the visitor has symptoms, the visitor will not be allowed to enter the hospital.

Will patients be given a mask when entering the hospital?

Yes. Patients scheduled for surgery will be provided a mask if we have an adequate supply available.

Will visitors be given a mask when entering the hospital?

Yes. Visitors will be given a mask if we have an adequate supply available, however, you are encouraged to bring your own. As recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), visitors are encouraged to wear a cloth mask when entering the hospital.

CLEANLINESS/STERILIZATION PROCEDURES

How are operating/procedure/diagnostic rooms prepared for patients?

Even before the recent COVID-19 pandemic, our surgical and environmental services team followed a strict process to sterilize and clean rooms. Industry guidelines include sterilizing all equipment used in the room and cleaning all high-touch areas. Cleaning also involves washing ceilings and walls in addition to disinfecting all surfaces in the operating room suite.

An ultraviolet disinfection is also used to further clean all surfaces. Regular audits are performed to ensure all rooms are properly cleaned.

What is your process?

Because of our cleaning and sterilization process, we are fully prepared to reduce environmental risk to our patients. Unlike other industries, the health care industry must fully comply with cleaning and sterilization guidelines to help eliminate bacteria and viruses. Deep cleaning is performed daily to reduce your risk in our hospitals.

Are common areas cleaned?

All public and common spaces are maintained throughout the day using hospital-approved disinfecting products.

OTHER

We encourage you to visit our website at www.covenanthealth.org for additional information. We have some helpful tools and resources related to COVID-19.

As always, please feel free to contact your health care provider for additional questions and concerns.