



The Eye Physicians and Surgeons

Pennsylvania Academy of Ophthalmology

COVID-19 Update for Physicians

Governor Wolf Orders Non-Life-Sustaining Businesses to Close

Governor Tom Wolf has ordered all non-life-sustaining businesses in Pennsylvania to close their physical locations as of 8 p.m., March 19, to slow the spread of Coronavirus or COVID-19.

In Governor Wolfe's shutdown announcement, offices of physicians are considered "life-sustaining." He included a detailed list of essential vs. non-essential businesses by category, setting forth what may remain open, and any qualifications imposed on the business. With respect to health care, Offices of Physicians are permitted to remain open at this time, however "elective procedures [are] prohibited."

The AAO has gone further stating, "Barring special extenuating circumstances for the patient or physician, the Academy recommends **postponing all elective visits and surgery.**"

The PAO advises that for the safety of your patients, your staff and you, that face-to-face visits should be changed to telemedicine visits or postponed, with the exception of sight threatening conditions. For more information on coding telehealth see [AAO Practice Management](#)

The AAO's new guidance as of Mar 19 is excerpted below:

***NEW* Elective surgical procedures**

The American Academy of Ophthalmology supports the [recommendation from American College of Surgeons](#) and [guidelines from the CDC](#) regarding canceling elective surgeries. Specifically, the CDC recommends that health care providers:

- Delay all elective ambulatory provider visits
- Reschedule elective and non-urgent admissions
- Delay inpatient and outpatient elective surgical and procedural cases

- Postpone routine dental and eye care visits

Circumstances vary for hospitals, hospital-based outpatient surgery departments, freestanding ASCs and office-based procedures. However, all ophthalmologists should adjust their surgical volumes. Even outpatient ASC-based procedures may expose other patients and health care workers to virus shed from asymptomatic patients or even asymptomatic physicians. Elective surgical procedures also deplete scarce personal protective equipment, including but not limited to masks, gowns, gloves, and face shields.

Barring special extenuating circumstances for the patient or physician, the Academy recommends **postponing all elective visits and surgery**. The duration of postponement will be determined by evolving public health conditions. This recommendation is consistent with those of the American College of Surgeons, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Surgeon General and many other organizations. As noted above, the primary purposes are to reduce the risks of disease transmission and to help conserve scarce resources. The definition of “elective” is up to the ophthalmologist but in general should be defined as anything that can be postponed for 2 months without substantive risk to the patient’s vision, material functioning or general health.

See AAO’s Corona Virus Page for daily updates on COVID-19

PAO has created a physician forum on our website where members can ask questions and discuss issues as we move forward through this difficult period. You must create a login on at paeyemds.org. Hover over "Membership" and click on "Member Forum"