

Memo



ACTION: Priority levels added to surgery requests effective Oct. 28
Oct. 26, 2020

From: Spectrum Health System Command Center

The COVID-19 positive testing rate continues to increase in the Spectrum Health service area and among our team members. We are seeing higher COVID-19 positive inpatient volumes in Spectrum Health hospitals than at any other time in this pandemic. This increase coupled with other significant capacity concerns has led to the potential need to prioritize procedures to be performed on a daily/weekly basis going forward.

Priority levels added to surgery requests

In the event that we need to prioritize surgeries, Spectrum Health is asking providers to assign priority levels (1 to 4) to all new case requests, effective 7 a.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 28, 2020.

Assigning a priority level, based on individual patient severity and urgency, allows for more expeditious planning in a dynamic environment. This work will be executed by the surgery business operations team, in partnership with enterprise scheduling, Spectrum Health Medical Group, independent practice leadership and surgeons. Levels are defined from 1 (urgent/emergent that can't wait) to 4 (those that can be deferred for as long as the event might last). As resources become more constrained, cases may have to be rescheduled or deferred, starting with level 4. Physician judgment is very important in understanding the nature of the procedure and the patient's medical history.

Surgery levels must be included as a component of all newly boarded case requests effective Oct. 28, 2020, until further notice. If the case is still in the queue, please add the surgery level before submitting. The levels are as follows:

- **Level 1:** Patient has imminent risk to life or limb within 30 days if the surgery is not performed.
- **Level 2:** Patient will face long-lasting harm with possible risk of mortality or metastases between one and six months if the surgery is not performed.
- **Level 3:** Postponement could impact the health, safety and welfare of the patient. This includes surgeries done to curtail pain requiring escalating doses of opioids, to preserve the ability for self-care, to complete staged procedures which are time-sensitive in nature and/or would otherwise require a different operative plan if not completed.
- **Level 4:** Postponement would **not** significantly impact the health, safety and welfare of the patient for the anticipated duration of the situation. All other cases not meeting any above criteria.

Please refer to the [new surgery levels guide](#) with detailed procedure examples by specialty. The surgery levels sheet also will be sent to practice office managers.

If we defer surgeries to free up inpatient beds or to free up team members who can be redeployed to support COVID-19 admissions, we will handle in a precise manner rather than, for instance, canceling all elective cases at all sites. We will consider the resources needed to meet the needs of an inpatient COVID-19 surge, identifying specific procedures and locations with the intent of causing the least possible disruption. Central to these decisions will be safety for our surgical patients, including any impact that deferring a case might cause.

Thank you for your partnership during these unprecedented times. Please direct questions to the System Command Center at 616.391.5509 or covid19@spectrumhealth.org