Elective surgery during COVID-19 pandemic

Information for referrers

Coronaviruses are a large group of viruses that can cause illnesses ranging from a mild common cold to severe disease. COVID-19 is a new coronavirus identified in December 2019 and has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation.

Coronavirus infections remain present in our community and WA Health has scaled back elective surgery to enable health services to effectively manage. Reducing elective surgery has increased hospital capacity and assisted to preserve our personal and protective equipment (PPE), which is essential to protect staff from infection, and minimise risk to patients.

Elective surgery will resume in a phased approach to balance the ongoing need for hospital capacity to treat COVID-19 patients, the health and safety of patients and hospital staff, and the availability of resources to undertake the surgery, including personal protective equipment (PPE).

Effective from 27 April 2020, WA Health hospitals will recommence Category 2 and some Category 3 elective surgery procedures in a staged approach. Elective surgery will continue to be scheduled based on clinical need; however Category 2 patients will be prioritised, particularly in those cases where surgery was recently cancelled.

Hospitals will develop local strategies for how elective surgery cases will be recommenced based on prioritised clinical need and the need to address overboundary cases.

Hospitals will be making contact with patients and referrers and we ask that you support them to do this process without making direct contact with us, unless requested.

If you have a patient whose symptoms worsen during this time, you should update the referral as you ordinarily would.

For elective surgery that is deferred, this does not mean that the patient has been removed from the waitlist. Waitlists will continue to be maintained in accordance with the Elective Surgery Access and Waiting List Management Policy to ensure consistent, standardised practices across all hospital sites.

Consistent practices will ensure that the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is able to be assessed across the system. It is expected that there will be significant impacts on elective surgery waiting times. Whilst not ideal, this is unfortunately unavoidable in the current environment.

More information,

Refer to the frequently updated COVID-19 clinical alerts for General Practitioners (GPs) available here:

More assessment, management and local referral information specific to GPs and clinicians is also available on the Health Pathways WA website: https://wa.healthpathways.org.au. Please email healthpathways@wapha.org.au for log on details if required.

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This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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