Ohio continues to be a leader in proactive restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19 and securing the resources necessary to do so. On March 17, 2020, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Director Amy Acton, MD, MPH announced an ODH Order requiring the cancellation of all non-essential or elective surgeries or procedures that use personal protective equipment (PPE). This Order is effective at 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, March 18, 2020.

The stated purpose of the ODH Order is for the preservation of PPE and critical hospital capacity and resources in the state needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic and for the protection of the state’s health care workforce during “this unprecedented event.”

The ODH Order defines a non-essential surgery as a “procedure that can be delayed without undue risk to the current or future health of a patient.” The ODH Order also provides examples of essential surgeries or procedures being those that present a:

1. Threat to the patient’s life if surgery or procedure is not performed;
2. Threat of permanent dysfunction of an extremity or organ system;
3. Risk of metastasis or progression of staging; or
4. Risk of rapidly worsening to severe symptoms (time sensitive).

Procedures and surgeries that do not meet these criteria and utilize PPE are cancelled pursuant to the ODH Order. The ODH Order further instructs, to preserve PPE, all non-essential individuals are to be removed from surgery/procedure rooms and other patient care areas. The ODH Order applies to all hospital and outpatient surgery or procedure providers in the state. Each such facility/provider is to establish an internal governance process to ensure that the principles of the ODH Order are being followed.

The ODH Order is consistent with and took into consideration the March 16, 2020 Guidelines from the Ohio Hospital Association (OHA). In making this announcement, the Governor noted the OHA has estimated that the amount of PPE Ohio will need during the COVID-19 pandemic is equal to the amount of PPE available nationally. The Governor further noted, "By postponing elective hospital procedures that are safe to delay, we can protect patients and providers. This will also help us preserve critically short supplies of PPE and preserve inpatient beds and other equipment for critically ill patients."

The ODH Order will remain in effect until rescinded or modified by the Director of ODH or until the Governor declares that the existing State of Emergency established in his March 9, 2020 Executive Order no longer exists.

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