

Non-emergency surgeries are rebounding, but backlogs remain

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The coronavirus pandemic put elective ear, nose and throat surgeries in the United States on the back burner last spring, but a new study finds those numbers largely rebounded within a few months.

Still, "as the pandemic continues, we've noted that otolaryngology surgeries are still backlogged and this impacts the health and well-being of patients," said study senior author Dr. C. Matthew Stewart. He's an associate professor of otolaryngology-head and [neck surgery](#) at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore.

"To address this, we plan to keep monitoring trends in surgical volumes to develop helpful strategies for reducing or eliminating such backlogs during future pandemics or other crises," Stewart said in a university news release.

His team analyzed data on nonessential inpatient and outpatient ear, nose and throat (otolaryngology) surgeries performed at 609 hospitals nationwide between March 1, 2019 and

Sept. 30, 2020.

Only hospitals with a minimum of 20 otolaryngology surgeries a month before the pandemic were included in the study.

There were 18% fewer outpatient surgeries in April 2020 than in April 2019, and also a decline in inpatient surgeries, with the biggest drops seen in the mid-Atlantic states and parts of the South, where there was a 40% decrease compared to the previous year.

The largest decreases in nonessential surgeries occurred in regions hit hardest during the early stages of the pandemic, according to the study.

But by September 2020, nonessential outpatient and inpatient surgeries had returned to 97% and 99%, respectively, of pre-pandemic levels. That shows that ear, nose and throat specialists met patient care needs even when the United States was still in the [pandemic](#), according to the researchers.

They also said that the findings could be used to determine how quickly [health care facilities](#) can resume surgeries after a future crisis.

The findings were recently published in the journal *JAMA Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery*.

More information: The American Society of Anesthesiologists has more on [COVID-19 and elective surgery](#).

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