**LHSC gradually expands clinical services during the pandemic**

London Health Sciences Centre is moving forward with an initial plan to gradually and carefully expand some clinical services that were paused during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Planned surgeries, procedures and related ambulatory care for patients at LHSC are slowly resuming, with prioritization based on clinical evidence and need.

“LHSC has been working with our regional partners to keep safety at the heart of our developing strategy to gradually and safely expand clinical services,” says Dr. Paul Woods, LHSC President & CEO. “The expansion of hospital services is being carefully considered and balanced with the need to maintain capacity in the event of any surge in COVID-19 cases.”

This follows the [recent amendment to the Ministry of Health’s Directive #2](https://www.oha.com/Bulletins/Directive%202%20May%2026%202020.pdf) and regional approval of the hospital’s plan by Ontario Health West and support from the Middlesex-London Health Unit. [The Phase 1 Summary of LHSC’s Clinical Service Expansion Plan is available from the COVID-19 website](https://intra.lhsc.on.ca/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/service-changes/clinical-services-expansion).

“It is important to note that this is not business as usual. We must strike a balance between slowly starting scheduled care and continuing to be ready for whatever COVID-19 might throw our way,” explains Dr. Woods.

As part of the gradual reintroduction of services, all health-care providers including LHSC must comply with [operational requirements](https://publicaffairs.cmail19.com/t/d-l-mhrdlld-jkiipkiui-y/) and follow key principles outlined in the [Ontario Health framework](https://www.ontariohealth.ca/sites/ontariohealth/files/2020-05/A%20Measured%20Approach%20to%20Planning%20for%20Surgeries%20and%20Procedures%20During%20the%20COVID-19%20Pandemic.pdf). This includes an ethical prioritization of patient care while carefully consideration criteria such as adequate human resources; supplies of Personal Protective Equipment and necessary medications; diagnostic and lab testing capacity; and, critical care beds and support. LHSC is also working closely with home and community care as well as primary care services.

“The constraints that hospitals face are significant,” notes Dr. Woods. “We will continue to monitor our care volumes and quality of care on a weekly basis, and adjust expansion plans as needed.”

This will involve testing, modeling and evaluating the impact of service expansion, taking a gradual and measured approach. Additional services will resume when it is safe to do so. “We recognize how difficult this waiting period can be for patients and families.”

Hospitals in Ontario had previously reduced services to be ready for an increase in patients with COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, LHSC provided urgent and emergency care for all patients, including essential health services.

As the health-care system has faced the challenges of COVID-19, LHSC has found new and innovative ways to deliver care. Thousands of our patients are now accessing remote and virtual care visits every week, with an average of 1300 virtual care visits a day. Virtual care now makes up half of the weekday outpatient visits.

Along with providing compassionate care, LHSC is dedicated to excellence in teaching and research. As part of the gradual expansion plans, learners will be invited back into hospitals as soon as possible. With the majority of research activity and its funding paused during the pandemic, London hospitals’ research arm [Lawson Health Research Institute](https://www.lawsonresearch.ca/coronavirus-covid-19-updates) is developing its own plans for gradual resumption of hospital-based research activity.

“I ask that you keep encouraging the community to remain diligent in following the public health recommendations and slowing the spread of the virus,” says Dr. Woods. “All efforts to ‘flatten the curve’ help ensure that hospitals have the capacity to respond to any future COVID-19 surges.”