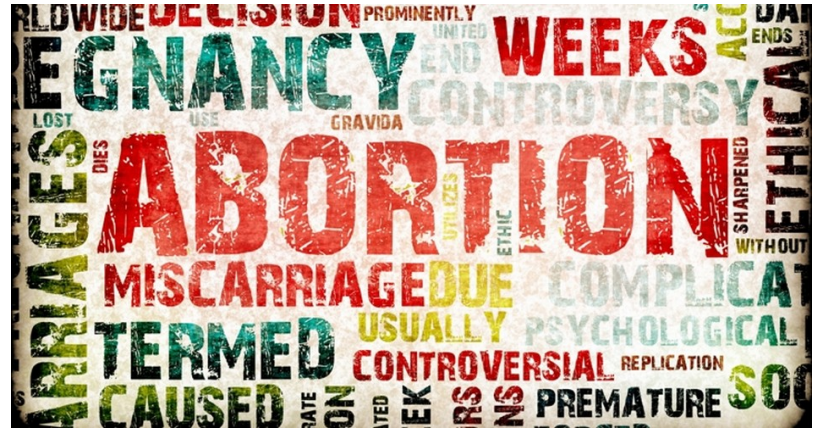




Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 24, 2020

Responses to COVID-19 Have Differing Impact on Abortion, Depending on the State

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a unique impact on the abortion industry by shining a light on the notion of “choice” and how that plays into what the states have deemed elective and non-essential. States such as Louisiana, Ohio, and Texas that mandated a stop to all non-essential surgeries and procedures in the wake of the coronavirus epidemic have declared abortion to be a non-essential procedure. Elsewhere, however, states have counted abortion among permissible “essential” procedures. And some states that have ordered a stop to all non-essential procedures have allowed abortion to exist in a sort of discretionary gray area, and, in some cases, may require further clarification from officials.



Louisiana became the first abortion-free state in the country after the state’s three remaining abortion clinics were temporarily closed.

Under the mandate issued by the Louisiana Department of Health on Saturday, all medical and surgical procedures are postponed unless they are required to treat an “emergency medical condition.”

“Gov. Edwards and the Department of Health have put measures in place to aggressively stem the spread of COVID-19 and slow the unnecessary use of personal protection equipment that should be donated to hospitals. This new rule that applies across the board to all medical and surgical procedures is consistent with that life-saving goal,” Benjamin Clapper, executive director of Louisiana Right to Life, explained.

One of the clinics, Hope Medical Group for Women, has vowed to “fight the law,” but Clapper contends the clinics should put their resources to better use.

“We suggest that instead of fighting Louisiana emergency health and safety regulations, the abortion facilities pitch in to fight COVID-19 and its effects by donating much-needed personal protection equipment to local emergency rooms,” Clapper opined.

Like Louisiana, Texas shut down all non-essential surgical procedures, including abortions. A March 22 [executive order](#) by Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared,

Beginning now and continuing until 11:59 p.m. on April 21, 2020, all licensed health care professionals and all licensed health care facilities shall postpone all surgeries and procedures that are not immediately medically necessary to correct a serious medical condition of, or to preserve the life of, a patient who without immediate performance of the surgery or procedure would be at risk for serious adverse medical consequences or death, as determined by the patient’s physician.



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A spokesperson for Governor Abbott later confirmed to the Associated Press that the order indeed applies to “abortion in most cases.”

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton further clarified the order on Monday with a statement to all licensed healthcare professionals.

“This prohibition applies throughout the State and to all surgeries and procedures that are not immediately medically necessary, including routine dermatological, ophthalmological, and dental procedures, as well as most scheduled healthcare procedures that are not immediately medically necessary such as orthopedic surgeries or any type of abortion that is not medically necessary to preserve the life or health of the mother,” Paxton explained.

Paxton’s statement explained the order was necessary to increase resources to help fight the coronavirus pandemic, and emphasized that the state would prosecute those who violate the order.

Paxton specifically called out abortion providers: “No one is exempt from the governor’s executive order on medically unnecessary surgeries and procedures, including abortion providers. Those who violate the governor’s order will be met with the full force of the law.”

Texas Right to Life told Life News that the order could save nearly 3,000 babies from abortion in the next month and has asked the state to expand its order to include chemical abortions.

“Texas Right to Life is grateful that the loss of life during the COVID-19 outbreak will be decreased thanks to the halt in abortions. We call on the State of Texas to expand the order to include chemical abortions as well,” it continued.

Despite a March 18 mandate by Ohio Health Director Amy Acton to cease all elective and non-essential surgeries effective last week, with few [exceptions](#), Ohio’s abortion clinics continued to perform abortions, prompting a direct order from Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost ordering them to stop doing so. Yost’s office wrote in letters sent on Friday to violating clinics that surgical abortions “involve the use of PPE [personal protective equipment], which is currently in demand to fight the coronavirus pandemic.”

“This is not an abortion issue,” Bethany McCorkle, a spokeswoman for the Ohio Attorney General’s Office, clarified to CNN. “A letter was also sent to a urology group that was allegedly performing elective surgeries. As our client, if Dr. Acton’s office determines that her order was violated by any surgical facility in Ohio, they can refer it to our office to pursue legal action on behalf of the Ohio Department of Health.”

Planned Parenthood has issued a statement contending it can continue to provide abortions in Ohio while abiding by the state’s order regarding personal protective equipment and accused Yost and Ohio Right to Life president and State Medical Board member Mike Gonidakis of “exploiting the Covid-19 crisis to further their agenda to close Ohio’s abortion clinics,” an accusation rejected by Acton, who asserts her order was apolitical.

“I am the doctor for 11.7 million people and all women no matter where they fall on this,” she said. “And I think that’s very important we cannot allow the politics of things to get in the way of doing what we have to do in a state of emergency.”

Meanwhile, though a number of other states have called for a stop to all non-essential surgeries and procedures, abortion clinics have conducted business as usual and it is unclear whether the states will clarify their orders to include abortion and punish those who fail to comply.



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In Pennsylvania, for example, where Democratic Governor Tom Wolf issued a March 19 executive order calling for closures to all non-essential businesses, abortion clinics [continue](#) to operate. Governor Wolf announced that enforcement actions on his executive order would begin this week, and could include citations, fines, and license suspensions, but has not specifically addressed abortion practices. As noted by Life News, Wolf has worked to force taxpayers to fund Planned Parenthood, so it seems unlikely he will take extreme action against the industry.

In California, despite orders for all 40 million residents to remain at home and all non-essential businesses to close, all seven Planned Parenthood affiliates remain operational and continue to [provide abortions](#).

In some states, officials have carved out [exceptions](#) for abortions, despite orders to discontinue elective and non-urgent procedures.

In Washington, for example, Governor Jay Inslee declared abortion to be an "[essential service](#)." Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker and California Governor Gavin Newsom have done the same. North Carolina Health Department spokeswoman Sarah Peel has said abortion clinics are not covered by a directive asking hospitals to suspend all elective procedures.

Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear has ordered an end to most elective medical procedures, the *Courier Journal* [reports](#), but his order left a lot of discretion to providers to determine which services to cancel, thereby enabling abortions to continue.

Pro-abortion groups claim the states who have discontinued abortions are using the coronavirus crisis to advance an agenda.

"Abortion is time-sensitive, essential health care," said Katherine Hancock Ragsdale, president of the National Abortion Federation. "Women deserve better than a craven exploitation of a health care crisis in furtherance of an anti-abortion agenda."

But pro-life advocates have seized on claims of "my body, my choice" to underscore the elective nature of abortion.

"If abortion is a 'choice' then abortion is an elective procedure," said Mark Harrington, president of the anti-abortion group Created Equal.

Raven Clabough acquired her bachelor's and master's degrees in English at the University of Albany in upstate New York. She currently lives in Pennsylvania and has been a writer for The New American since 2010.



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