

Hospital Visits Reached Record Low in April as COVID-19 Spread

Hospital visits declined 33-62% from March to mid-April but started to rise as elective procedures resumed by the end of the month, according to a new report.



Source: Getty Images

By **Jacqueline LaPointe**

May 11, 2020 - The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on hospital visits, driving volumes to record lows. But patient volumes could be on the upswing as elective procedures resume, TransUnion Healthcare recently **reported**.

An analysis of over 500 hospitals across the nation found that hospital visit volumes further declined between the weeks of March 1st through the 7th and April 12th through the 18th. Volumes fell between 33 and 62 percent after already sliding throughout the month of March. TransUnion Healthcare previously **reported** that hospital visit volumes fell between 32 and 60 percent in March alone.

The updated analysis showed that hospital visits may have reached their lowest levels, but recent trends also indicated early signs of improvements.

For example, the analysis showed that outpatient hospital visits saw a record one-week 64 percent decline during the week of April 5th, as compared to pre-coronavirus volumes. However, outpatient hospital visit volumes started to rise by about 4 percent

between the weeks of April 5th and April 12th, marking the first increase in hospital visit volumes since COVID-19 was deemed a pandemic, TransUnion Healthcare reported.

“Our research suggests that as hospital providers look to re-engage patients and resume elective procedures, the slight rise in outpatient visits may indicate very early stages of patient volume recovery,” said David Wojczynski, president of TransUnion Healthcare.

More than half the states have started to reopen according to the Trump administration’s plan for bolstering the economy, *The New York Times* **reported** Saturday.

The plan requires states, among other criteria, to have a 14-day decline in either documented COVID-19 cases or positive tests. But the number of coronavirus patients continues to rise nationwide, with over 4 million confirmed cases in the US, **data** from Johns Hopkins University showed at the time of publication.

The growing number of confirmed COVID-19 cases prompted lawmakers and healthcare providers to stop elective procedures and other non-emergent services to reduce exposure to the highly contagious virus. That number also prevented patients from seeking hospital services.

About 55 percent fewer Americans sought hospital care in March and April due to COVID-19, a new **report** from Strata Decision found.

The sharpest declines were services for life-threatening illnesses, such as a 57 percent decrease in cardiology, and a 55 percent decrease in breast health with a 37 percent decline in cancer care overall. Inpatient procedures and surgeries that normally drive hospital revenue – accounting for over 50 percent of total payments made to hospitals – also fell dramatically, with significant decreases in hip (-79 percent) and knee (-99 percent) replacement surgeries, as well as in spinal fusions (-81 percent) and repair of fractures (-38 percent).

“Hospitals across the country are eager to open their doors to elective procedures so they can serve their community, care for their patients, and survive economically but how they get there is literally a hundred-billion-dollar question,” said Dan Michelson, CEO of Strata Decision Technology. “Many facilities will likely be hard-pressed to handle the surge while simultaneously maintaining capacity for COVID-19 patients.”

Re-engagement of patients will be key to handling increasing hospital visit volumes, stated Jonathan Wiik, principal of healthcare strategy at TransUnion Healthcare.

“As providers approach patients, one consideration will be to check-in with those who may have delayed necessary care the most, then engage those who would like to reschedule as soon as possible,” Wiik explained.

Younger patients were also more eager to reschedule delayed or canceled services, TransUnion Healthcare found in a separate [survey](#). Meanwhile, older patients part of the Baby Boomer and Silent Generation groups demonstrated the largest declines in hospital visits by nearly 60 percent each, the recent analysis found.

Having visibility into patient volumes across service lines is critical to the re-engagement strategy, Michelson added. Tracking hospital visit volume will allow organizations to “safely engage patients while balancing the clinical, operational and financial complexity and pressures imposed by COVID-19,” he said.