

COVID-19 and Abortion Advocacy: Strategies to Consider

Guidance from the National Institute for Reproductive Health

Abortion is essential, and reproductive health care cannot be put on hold in times of crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented outbreak — elected and public health officials are implementing policies to limit spread of the virus and flatten the curve, sometimes with unintended consequences for abortion access. Unfortunately, there are a few who are exploiting the pandemic to further their opposition to abortion care.

NIRH works with state and local advocates across the country to advance reproductive freedom and protect abortion access. Below are strategies for local leaders to consider to ensure that abortion care remains secure and accessible during these very challenging times.

Strategies to maintain access to abortion care during the COVID-19 crisis:

1. If the locality or state finds it necessary to impose any limitations on travel, emergency policies should contain exceptions for people accessing time-sensitive reproductive health care, including abortion, filling prescriptions for contraception, or accessing pregnancy-related care.
2. If the locality or state orders the closure of “nonessential” facilities, emergency policies must exempt reproductive health care facilities that provide time-sensitive reproductive health care such as abortion, contraception, or pregnancy-related care, at least for the purposes of providing such care.
3. Any locality, state, or hospital-specific policies limiting or eliminating “elective procedures” at hospitals must allow hospitals to continue to provide any time-sensitive reproductive health care that must be performed in a hospital setting, or must direct hospitals to provide referral information for nearby facilities.
4. Emergency orders that require people to maintain social distancing in public places should be enforced carefully in front of reproductive health care facilities. Although these facilities often experience intense protest activity, during this public health crisis, it is critical that no group of people gather together and attempt to approach patients or providers. There have been reports of clinic protestors ignoring social distancing guidelines and endangering women accessing abortion as well as clinic staff. If enforcing an existing emergency order is not the best option, feel free to contact NIRH to discuss other possibilities, which might include requesting a specific order for the area or zone around the clinic.



Support for abortion access as an essential health service:

1. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) [issued a statement](#) in conjunction with several other medical organizations deeming abortion an essential and time-sensitive service and calling for collaboration between clinics and hospitals to ensure abortion access is not compromised during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The National Abortion Federation (NAF) [issued a statement](#) calling on leaders to treat outpatient abortion providers as essential businesses, and on hospital systems to continue to provide abortion care.

If you are an advocate or elected official and want more information on this topic, please contact Jenny Dodson Mistry at jmistry@nirhealth.org for support.