

What Healthcare Facility Teams Can Do During the COVID-19 Pandemic



As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, healthcare facilities have experienced challenges like never before. Faced early on with [fears of overwhelming capacity](#), [shortage of supplies](#) and [risks to healthcare workers](#), many facilities pivoted to holding off on non-emergency surgeries and other procedures.

Several months later, and things look vastly different depending on where you are. Initially, [New York City saw the largest surge in COVID-related cases](#). Now [other states are experiencing their own waves](#). Experts anticipate that the fall and winter seasons will bring another contender: the flu, which will add its own weight to the already strained resources in healthcare facilities.

It's important for healthcare facilities and their facility teams to plan for two basic scenarios: in a surge and out of a surge. If you assess what you can do during non-surge times, it can better prepare you for

an increase in patients. Additionally, it's wise to have [a facility plan](#) for times when you're experiencing that increase. As we all know, anything can happen during that time. It's likely you won't have resources or bandwidth to address issues within the building infrastructure. But that doesn't mean you can't be as ready as you can be, even with great unknowns.

What can facility teams do during a COVID-related surge in patient admissions?

When experiencing overwhelming amounts of patients, most healthcare facilities are making do with what they have. That typically means that facility teams are also running hard, fixing only what's essential and leaving the rest for later. Add the complexity of budgets and regulations, and it only becomes more difficult to get what's needed.

Generally speaking, most healthcare facilities need these spaces during a surge:

- COVID-19 care zones that are separate from other spaces with their own designated entrances, equipment and sanitation regulations
- Non-COVID spaces for other types of medical care with their own designated entrances, equipment and sanitation regulations
- Screening areas for entry into specific spaces, units and wings that can accommodate temperature testing, questionnaires and mask procedures for visitors and patients
- Safe spaces for healthcare workers to put on and remove Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and frequently wash hands, sterilize equipment and disinfect properly

Originally, there was concern that hospitals may become so overrun with COVID patients that alternate spaces would need to be set up. For example, a university might turn a wing into a patient care unit or a temporary unit might be brought to the grounds. Luckily, the demand for these on-the-fly space reconfigurations has dwindled. Most healthcare facilities are able to manage the amount of patients they're seeing, but there is definitely strain and it's an exercise in the unknown. However, it's still wise to prepare for this and the CDC has guidelines for the use of relief healthcare facilities.



What can facility teams do during non-surge times?

Perhaps the best power that facility teams have during this pandemic is what they do during non-surge times. It's hard to anticipate how challenging it could be during a surge, so plan what you can manage while patient admissions and hospital occupancy is at a low. Because it's important to have designated areas and protocols during a surge, it's wise to prepare for them beforehand or in between surges.

Here is a quick list of some example non-surge activities:

- Ensure that you have the spaces you need and the protocols to go along with them.
- Cleaning standards are heightened no matter what stage you're in, but extensive deep cleaning is ideal during non-surge times.
- Additionally, non-surge time is when you can make whatever electrical updates you need to the building, including swapping out electrical devices for hospital grade styles, reorganizing cables to life-saving equipment, creating outdoor charging spaces and redesigning waiting areas with easy-to-install power solutions.
- Aesthetic changes may still take a backseat to more critical updates, like ensuring spaces are safe and equipped for potential patient waves.

THE POWER TO CHANGE

If you need to **redesign a healthcare space during a non-surge time**, consider layouts like this example for a waiting room:



While paint and fixtures may remain unchanged, spacing out seating areas and more efficiently running power are must-do items for any non-surge activities. Goals for the team are to lower transmission and keep vital life-saving equipment up and running. Taking care of these needs in the downtime, however short it may be, could be the difference between life or death.

Healthcare facilities have been up against hurdles since early spring, and there's no indication that we're in the clear yet. As facility teams work harder than ever to help hospitals and keep everyone safe, it's a good practice to continuously reprioritize as needed. Keep returning to your checklist and reevaluate it with any new information you receive.

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