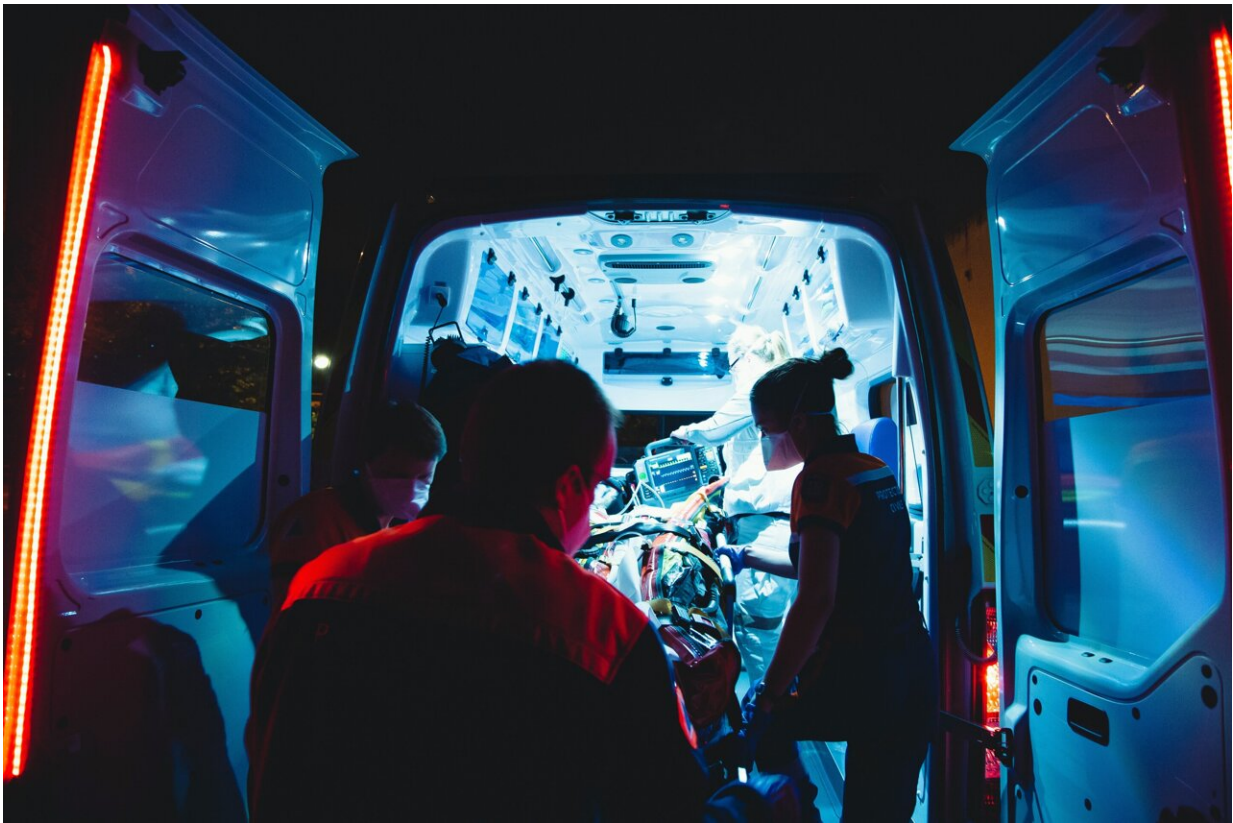


# Omicron may cause 100,000 cancelled operations in England this winter

December 16 2021

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

An additional 100,000 elective operations could be canceled in England this winter as a result of the Omicron wave leading to increased hospital admissions, a new study reveals.

The modeling study, published as a peer-reviewed research letter in *The Lancet*, finds that the [number](#) of elective operations performed each week is closely related to the number of patients in [hospital](#) with COVID-19.

Led by researchers at the University of Birmingham, the research team used NHS England data from September 2020 to July 2021 to develop a model to project elective surgery activity based on the number of COVID-19 patients in hospital.

Using this model, they estimate that, in the first two weeks of October 2021, the volume of elective operations in England was reduced by 21.9% (a drop of 14,348 operations per week) compared to the pre-pandemic period.

However, if the number of patients in hospital in England with COVID-19 increases to the levels seen in the first COVID-19 wave in April 2020, the volume of elective operations in England would be cut by 33.9% (a drop of 22,147 operations per week) compared to pre-pandemic.

This means that an increase in the number of COVID-19 admissions from October 2021 to April 2020 levels would result in 100,273 fewer elective operations performed over the three winter months (December 2021 to February 2022). Projections for reduction in elective operations across a range of scenarios is provided below.

Mr. Aneel Bhangu, Consultant Surgeon and Senior Lecturer at the NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Global Surgery at the University of Birmingham commented: "Our study shows that as more COVID-19 patients are admitted to hospital, surgical units are forced to cancel elective operations to release capacity to treat COVID-19."

"Hospitals work hard to prioritize life-saving operations, including those helping cancer patients. The greatest impact of hospital pressures from COVID-19 is on patients waiting for non-life saving, but quality of life transforming surgery.

"Cancelations may mean that patients wait even longer for operations like hip replacements, resulting in deterioration of their symptoms and increased disability. Ringfenced elective hubs are urgently needed to protect elective [surgery](#) this winter."

Dr. Dmitri Nepogodiev, Research Fellow at the NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Global Surgery at the University of Birmingham said: "Surgical patient numbers have been reduced by the measures hospitals have taken to ensure patient safety and reduce the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in hospital. These numbers are further diminished by each incremental increase in COVID-19 admissions to hospital."

**More information:** Projecting COVID-19 disruption to elective surgery, *The Lancet* (2021).

Provided by University of Birmingham

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