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Oklahoma governor halts abortions amid virus outbreak

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By SEAN MURPHY - Associated Press - Friday, March 27, 2020

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) - Abortions will be prohibited in Oklahoma under the state's ban on elective surgeries during the coronavirus outbreak, Gov. Kevin Stitt announced Friday.

Stitt amended his executive order to specifically prohibit abortions unless necessary to prevent health risks to the mother. The ban would apply through April 7, although it could be extended.

The governor issued an executive order Tuesday suspending all elective surgeries and minor medical procedures for 14 days to preserve dwindling supplies of protective equipment such as gloves, masks and face shields.

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Abortion rights groups immediately denounced Stitt's proposal.

"Oklahoma is the latest in a dangerous and alarming trend of state governments' abusing emergency powers to attempt to ban abortion care," said Nancy Northrup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights, a New York-based abortion rights group that has successfully sued Oklahoma several times over restrictions on abortion.

"The Center for Reproductive Rights is working with clinics in Oklahoma to assess the State's orders and will pursue every legal avenue to keep abortion available in the state."

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, which can include fever and cough but also milder cases of pneumonia, sometimes

requiring hospitalization. The risk of death is greater for older adults and people with other health problems.

Oklahoma has had 322 confirmed cases of coronavirus, although health officials say the actual number of infected persons is likely much higher. At least eight people have died, and more than 100 have been hospitalized.

Governors in Texas and Ohio have imposed similar abortion bans, leading to a federal lawsuit in the Lone Star State.