Vatican
Pope Leo XIV is seen after the Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 13, 20

Pope Leo XIV is seen after the Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 13, 2026. After the Angelus on Oct. 11, he announced that he would undergo surgery to remove a lung nodule. (OSV News photo/Matteo Pernaselci, Vatican Media)



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Pope Leo XIV announced that he will undergo surgery to remove a "small, localized nodule" in his lung, sparking the first public health concerns of the 71-year-old pope's tenure in leading the Catholic Church.

Leo told pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square following his customary Sunday prayer there that doctors had found the lung nodule "at a very early stage and is well-localized."

"The doctors believe that it is best to intervene, so, following their advice, I have decided to undergo surgery to remove it," he said.

A lung nodule is a small abnormal area of less than an inch that appears in the chest or abdomen during a CT scan, according to the American Cancer Society. It states that most lung nodules are not cancer and are "more often the result of old infections, scar tissue, or other causes."

The pope's operation will take place early this coming week at Rome's Gemelli hospital, where the popes typically receive medical care, and he is expected to remain in recovery for a week, the Vatican later told reporters.

But there is no sign that Leo is bracing for a long-term recovery.

He is lined up for a major trip through Uruguay, Argentina and Peru at the start of November where he will take a dozen flights over 11 days. Speaking to a group of Peruvians gathered in the square for his noontime prayer, the pope thanked them for their prayers "and for the pastoral visit I will make to Peru."

The youngest pope elected since St. John Paul II was made pope at 58, Leo is known to be in good shape and remain active, regularly playing tennis and swimming during his weekly visits to the papal retreat outside Rome.

His predecessor, Pope Francis, was plagued by health issues including pneumonia and bronchitis which sent him to the hospital on numerous occasions and affected his ability to speak in public in the final years of his life.

Though Leo announced his operation to the world calmly, the news could explain the timing of the pope's recent decision to name Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle as the new dean of the College of Cardinals, a position which plays a key role in the conclave to elect a new pope. The Filipino cardinal will be responsible for organizing the closed-door meetings of cardinals ahead of the election of a new pope and, if under 80 and therefore among the cardinals streaming into the Sistine Chapel, for organizing the vote itself.

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