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Pope Francis stops to greet police that escorted him as he arrives at the Vatican after leaving the hospital on July 14, 2021. (AP Photo/Riccardo De Luca)

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Rome — July 14, 2021

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Pope Francis was discharged from a Rome hospital and returned home to the Vatican on July 14, ten days after undergoing surgery to remove half his colon.

Francis, 84, sat in the passenger seat of the Ford car, which left Rome's Gemelli Polyclinic around 10:45 a.m. He made a stop to pray at Rome's Santa Maria Maggiore basilica, which has a beloved icon of the Virgin Mary which Francis always visits after returning home from a foreign trip.

After the brief stop, Francis' small motorcade approached a side entrance to the Vatican. The Ford stopped before reaching the gate and Francis got out with the help of a bodyguard. He greeted some Italian security guards — two army soldiers standing guard and a handful of Italian police motorcycle escorts — and got back in the car, which then entered the Vatican through the Perugino gate.

Francis had half of his colon removed for a severe narrowing of his large intestine on July 4, his first major surgery since he became pope in 2013. It was a planned procedure, scheduled for early July when the pope's audiences are suspended anyway and Francis would normally take some time off.

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The Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni, confirmed Francis' return from the hospital and visit to the Rome basilica. Praying before the icon, Francis "expressed his gratitude for the success of his surgery and offered a prayer for all the sick, especially those he had met during his stay in hospital," Bruni said in the statement.

Francis will have several more weeks to recover before beginning to travel again in September. There are plans for him to visit Hungary and Slovakia [in a Sept. 12-15 trip](#), and then make a quick stop in Glasgow, Scotland, in November to participate in the COP26 climate conference. Other possible trips are also under review.

The Vatican had originally said Francis could be discharged last weekend, but later said he would stay a few days extra for further recovery and rehabilitation therapy.

The pope appeared for the first time in public since the surgery on July 11, looking in good form as he delivered his weekly prayer from the 10th floor hospital balcony, surrounded by young cancer patients. He used the occasion to call for free health care for all.

On the afternoon of July 13, the eve of his release, he visited the pediatric cancer ward, which is located on the same floor as the papal hospital suite.

The Argentine pope had part of one lung removed when he was a young man but has otherwise enjoyed relatively robust health.

[AP video journalist Luigi Navarro contributed to this report.]