Banner Health leader: Stay masked, stay safe

Marjorie Bessel, MD, outlines steps to keep yourself and your community safe from COVID-19

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" All of us must do our part to protect ourselves and others by preventing the spread of the coronavirus "

Make no mistake. The coronavirus (COVID-19) is serious. It is deadly. It is highly contagious. And, it is still prevalent throughout the United States. To date, over 200,000 Americans have lost their lives to this novel virus—far more than most other contagious illnesses and diseases.

There is no vaccine for COVID-19 at this time, nor is there a cure, which is why all of us must do our part to protect ourselves and others by preventing the spread of the coronavirus.

Behaviors to slow the spread of COVID-19 remain necessary, and they do make an impact. Putting distance between you and others is key. This virus is mainly spread through droplets when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes, which means if you are more than six feet away from others, the likelihood of those droplets reaching you is much lower. In addition, [wearing a mask](#) when you are within six feet of others is extremely important. You should do this even if others are not. Masks can help protect you from contracting the virus as well as help to prevent you from spreading the virus if you have COVID-19, even if you don't know you are infected. If you have symptoms that would suggest an illness of any kind, you should also stay at home [except to seek medical care] until those symptoms have resolved.

It is still recommended that you do not attend large gatherings. Gatherings of more than 10 can put you and other attendees at risk. Large gatherings can become "super spreader" events, which means that many who attend are at risk of contracting COVID-19 if an infected person is present. The infected person could be asymptomatic and still spread the virus to others.

[Quarantine and isolation practices](#) are also very important to protect your family, friends and the community. If you are exposed to someone with COVID-19, you should begin the quarantine process. You can also [schedule an appointment](#) for COVID-19 testing to find out if you have been infected. If you have COVID-19, you must isolate immediately. This means that you should not be near anyone else, except to seek medical care. Isolation can be difficult if you live in a home with others, but it is important to protect the individuals who also reside in your home. It is recommended that you designate a "sick room" and use a separate bathroom, if possible. It is safe to be around others once 10 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared, you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours and your symptoms of COVID-19 are improving.

Those who experience severe symptoms of COVID-19, including shortness of breath, will likely need to be hospitalized and closely monitored by a team of experienced medical professionals. Hospitalization is not a trivial event. The onset of critical symptoms can happen quickly, at which time COVID-19 patients are moved to an ICU, many of them put on a ventilator. Most ventilated COVID-19 patients remain in the ICU and on a ventilator for two weeks or more.

Winter is just around the corner—a time of the year when we see a much higher prevalence of respiratory illness. That is why it is also strongly advised that you get a flu shot. The sooner, the better. Your behaviors to reduce the spread of COVID-19 will also help to reduce the spread of the flu.

Please stay well, protect your loved ones and help us reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses like COVID-19 and the flu. You can make a difference.

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https://stage.mediaroom.com/bannerhealth/COVIDsafetystatement