

Dr. Bessel COVID-19 Press Conference 1/27

Script

COVID-19 cases, positivity rate and hospitalizations are on the decline in Arizona. That said, it is important to note that levels are still much higher than desired, and Arizona continues to lead the country in COVID-19 infections per capita according to the CDC COVID-19 tracker.

We are currently caring for more COVID-19 patients in our Arizona hospitals and ICUs than we were during the peak of the summer surge. We still have thousands of out-of-state workers here to augment our employed staff. We continue to redeploy corporate team members and utilize upskilled staff as helping hands in our ICUs. Visitor restrictions are still in place. And, we have just started to resume elective, medically necessary surgery on a very limited basis at some of our hospitals. Patient care in our hospitals has not yet returned to a state that I would define as usual and customary, and I would caution you against celebrating too early as we slowly work our way out of this surge. We have a long way to go before we can return to more normal operations that we experienced for a brief period back in September.

As you have seen in data reported by AzDHS in recent weeks, new COVID-19 reported deaths continue to rise. This is expected as death is a lagging indicator of COVID-19. What I mean by that is that we typically see a rise in cases first, then

hospitalizations, ICU admissions and ventilations. These are followed by an increase in deaths several weeks later.

We continue to look to the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation to understand what we can expect to experience in the next several weeks to months. The IHME modeling shows that we will reach roughly 18,500 deaths in Arizona by May 2021 if we continue to do what we are currently doing to combat the virus. IHME also suggests that the death total could reach 22,200 by May if there is any easing of restrictions or mandates during that time. Vaccine is a long-term strategy, which is why the IHME tool does not indicate that it will have a significant impact on preventing deaths here in Arizona during the next few months as we descend from this surge. Mitigation and enforcement will be much more effective in reducing COVID-19 deaths in the coming weeks and months.

Let's talk a bit about what is ahead of us in the state of Arizona. Our forecasting tools predict that we will experience many more weeks of high hospitalization volumes as we descend from this surge, which will likely take us another two to three months to fully recover from. We will do this simultaneously as we work with our state and county health department partners to vaccinate as many people as possible in the communities we serve. It is estimated that we will need roughly 80% of the population vaccinated in order to reach herd immunity.

Yesterday, Banner Health reached an exciting milestone in our vaccination journey. We exceeded 100,000 vaccines

administered by our health system. Back in December, we were one of the first vaccination sites to open up in the state of Arizona. Despite the incredible pressures upon us on the frontlines of our hospitals, we knew the importance of this work and we rose to the occasion. During this past month, we have created an efficient mass vaccination process, even utilizing our internal process engineers to fine-tune the operations as we are now operating several sites in Arizona and sites also in other states where we operate. We are pleased to see others like AzDHS and Grand Canyon University open additional mass vaccination sites in Arizona, the state of Wyoming for its ability to transition vaccine administration to the health department and the collaboration in Colorado between health systems, the state and counties which has expanded vaccination efforts in that market. The more vaccines we administer and the faster we do it, the sooner we'll emerge from this pandemic.

It is extremely important for all Arizonans to follow the recommendations of the CDC and health leaders during this time. Following their guidance is the best way to protect yourself and prevent the spread of COVID-19 so that we can return to a more normal way of living. Continue to shrink your circles and wear your masks properly. Get the vaccine when it is available to you and continue to wear your mask around others even after you are vaccinated. If you recall from my remarks last week, this is extremely important because the current EUAs for both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were issued because of the vaccines abilities to prevent serious illness in those who

have been vaccinated. We do not yet know if those who are vaccinated can still become infected and shed or transmit the virus to others.

Masks should be worn by all members of the community who are 2 years old and above when you are around others who you do not live with. They should be worn completely over your nose and under your chin and should fit snugly. Avoid touching or adjusting your mask while it is in use, and make sure to wash or sanitize your hands after touching or removing your mask.

Masks with multiple layers are recommended for better protection, and they should not have any exhalation valves. Make sure to launder your cloth masks between uses.

At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have for me.