

Dr. Marjorie Bessel press conference opening remarks- Dec. 23, 2020

Script

Arizona's health care system continues to be stressed by the COVID-19 pandemic. While we have not yet reached 100 percent of our total licensed bed capacity, several of our hospitals like Banner – University Phoenix, Banner Thunderbird and Banner Desert have been operating above 100 percent capacity for quite some time. In addition, our ICU occupancy remains very high.

Currently, COVID-19 patients account for 58 percent of Banner's adult ICU beds. 74 percent of our adult ventilator usage is COVID-19 patients. I have talked before about how sick these COVID-19 patients are. To put it into context for you, the average non-COVID-19 ICU patient is on a ventilator for three to four days. A COVID-19 patient is on a ventilator for an average of 10 to 14 days. They also spend three to four times longer in an ICU. We started November with our ICU occupancy closer to 75 percent of our peak winter volume, and now we are at 160 percent of our peak winter occupancy.

This pressure has caused several Banner hospitals to halt or significantly reduce elective surgeries and procedures. I want to remind you that elective surgeries can include things like mastectomies, gallbladder surgeries and hip replacements. These are medically necessary procedures that, if delayed for too long, can result in medical complications that require hospitalization and intensive care.

I remain in regular contact with Dr. Christ and the Arizona Department of Health Services. I continue to share this concerning data with them

and have advocated for stronger mitigation to curb this trend. The Greater Phoenix Leadership Health Task Force sent a letter to all Arizona mayors, asking them to put into place mitigation, but acknowledged that the state had unfortunately not granted them authority to do the most impactful mitigation tactics. The question as to why the Governor has not granted Mayors the authority to make mitigation decisions that can be most impactful in curbing the trend has yet to be answered. The White House Coronavirus Task Force document continues to state that Arizona mitigation efforts must increase. The AzDHS business dashboard shows that some businesses in some counties should have had further mitigations and closures due to substantial community spread statistics. Substantial community spread statistics indicate the highest and worst level of COVID-19 spread.

In addition to mitigation, I have also continued to reinforce what we need everyone in the community to do their part to help us get this virus under control.

You hear these things from me every week, and I will repeat them for you again today. We need you to shrink your circles. That means that you should not engage with others who live outside of your household. That includes colleagues, friends, classmates and your extended family. When you are with those outside of your circle, we need you to always wear a mask.

With the holidays right around the corner, shrinking your circle and masking are particularly important. Your willingness and ability to adhere to them can be the difference between life and death. It might not be your own but contributing to the spread of this virus will further strain our health care system which will result in the delay of timely care or a shortage of critical resources like ICU nurses. Those things could have a devastating impact on members of our community who need health care.

Most of you did not take an oath to save lives, but today I'm asking you to join those of us who have so that we can collectively save as many lives as possible during this pandemic.

Before I open this up for questions, I would also like to talk about the importance of COVID-19 testing and timely treatment. Currently we have a COVID-19 treatment that can be administered in an outpatient setting for those who experience mild-to-moderate COVID-19 symptoms and meet the age and health condition criteria such as having diabetes. Antibodies can help the body clear the virus faster and reduce severity of symptoms, which can in turn prevent hospitalization.

We have found that this treatment has been underutilized, which is why we want to bring it to your attention again so that those who test positive can get a timely referral to begin the treatment within 10 days of the onset of their symptoms. If you test positive for COVID-19, talk to your primary care physician about antibody treatment. This is available for those who test positive and are over the age of 65, or those who test positive and are over the age of 55 with health conditions like diabetes. This can be helpful to you even if you are in the early stages of COVID-19 or have mild symptoms. Banner has this treatment available at seven different sites if your physician determines that it is appropriate.

Please do not dismiss symptoms. Even if they are mild, I would encourage you to get tested. Testing is important for timely treatment as well as preventing the spread of illness to others. Banner Urgent Cares are equipped to test patients for COVID-19 and can also provide those who qualify with a timely referral for antibody treatment.

For more information about monoclonal antibody treatment, visit www.bannerhealth.com/covid19.

Thank you to the media for your continued support during this challenging time. Keeping these important messages front and center is crucial and I very much appreciate our partnership. Happy to answer your questions with the remaining time.

- Marjorie Bessel, MD, Banner Health Chief Clinical Officer