

Dr. Bessel Press Conference 2/3

Script

We continue to see a gradual decline in most of our COVID-19 metrics in Arizona. Our 7-day average positivity rate is at 16%, eight percentage points lower than what it was at the peak of the current surge. While that is very good news, it is worth noting that the positivity rate is still very high. Health experts recommend that communities maintain a positivity rate below 5%. In addition, Arizona continues to be one of the leading states in the U.S. when it comes to number of cases per capita according to the CDC.

Currently, 44% of hospitalized patients in Arizona are COVID-positive. The number of total COVID patients is slightly lower than the peak of our summer surge. COVID-19 patients account for 60% of ICU hospitalizations.

At Banner Health, our ICUs remain very busy. ICU occupancy is still 10% higher than it was during the peak of the summer surge. We are seeing more patients with non-COVID illnesses get admitted to our ICUs as well. Ventilator usage continues to be 10% higher than the peak last summer.

While we remain busy, we are committed to providing necessary medical care for all Arizonans. That includes those whose medically necessary surgeries have been delayed over the past few months due to COVID-19. We are performing

hospital-based elective surgeries on a limited basis. As of February 1, we've expanded criteria further to include all out-patient hospital surgeries as well as in-patient surgeries that have a predicted length of stay of no more 3 nights in regular in-patient bed and 1 night in the ICU. Hospitals can still make decisions locally regarding which elective surgeries they will proceed with based on local resources and capacity.

I touched on mutations last week, but I wanted to circle back to that topic this week as there have been recent developments. Health officials have identified the presence of the U.K. variant in Arizona, and the South African variant was also identified in the U.S. As a reminder, the U.K. variant is more contagious than some of the other COVID strains, but the current vaccines on the market do appear to be effective against this variant. The South African strain has also shown to be more contagious. While research is ongoing, vaccines appear to be less effective against this variant, though still within the protective range and are highly recommended.

Banner continues to administer the Pfizer vaccine at several mass vaccination sites throughout Arizona as well as the Moderna vaccine in some of the smaller communities where we operate. To date, we have administered more than 125,000 vaccines. I want to assure you that we take great pride in this work and know the level of responsibility that is upon us. We are committed to administering all usable vaccine that we receive as quickly as possible.

Please get the vaccine when it is available to you. I cannot stress how important it is that we get the large majority of Americans vaccinated as quickly as possible. Do not be selective when it comes to vaccine manufacturer. The vaccines that are available under emergency use authorization are effective in preventing moderate to severe illness. They will provide you with protection, and you should get whichever one is made available to you as soon as you qualify.

Please continue to shrink your circles and wear your masks properly. This is important even after you get vaccinated.

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.