

Dr. Marjorie Bessel Press Conference

1/24/22

Good morning.

Hospitalization trends in our Arizona market continue to be of concern as confirmed cases in our state the past three weeks have been at record highs. As a reminder, hospitalizations typically lag overall cases in the market by 1 to 2 weeks. For this reason, our forecasting models predict that hospitalizations from this most recent Omicron surge will peak around mid-February.

Hospital admissions for COVID and suspected COVID have been steadily increasing since the beginning of this month. They now account for more than a third of our total patient population.

Staffing continues to be a top priority for us as we respond to this current wave of COVID cases and hospitalizations. As I have mentioned in previous press conferences, our team members are also members of the community. When positivity rates and case counts increase in our communities, our team members are exposed and infected with the virus, too. We continue to follow CDC return-to-work guidance for health care workers and utilize travel workers to augment our core staff. We are committed to providing a safe care environment for our patients and team members.

Due to limited staff availability, some of our Banner Urgent Care locations remain temporarily closed. If you need to access urgent care, please check online in advance to make sure your preferred location is open. It is also a good idea to schedule an appointment online if there are slots available. This will reduce your wait time. Banner Urgent Care also offers telehealth appointments. This service is a great option for those who want fast care right from home. You can schedule an urgent care telehealth appointment on the Banner Health website.

Vaccination continues to be your best defense to prevent serious illness, hospitalization and death due to COVID infection. Boosters will maximize your protection. Currently, 83% of hospitalized COVID patients at Banner are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated and 87% of ICU COVID patients unvaccinated or partially vaccinated.

Outpatient treatment for those who test positive with COVID is also available, though supply of these treatments remains limited. These treatments include the monoclonal antibody IV therapy Sotrovimab and oral antivirals, Paxlovid and Molnupiravir. All three drugs have received emergency use authorization by the FDA. Patients must meet criteria to receive a referral or prescription for these treatments, so it is important that you consult with your PCP or an urgent care provider as soon as you start experiencing symptoms. Your provider will determine if you qualify for these treatments. Due to limited supply, not all who qualify will receive them.

The Arizona Department of Health Services has developed antiviral prioritization tiering based on the supply in our state. Those who are 70 years of age or older or individuals with major immune suppression are top priority. Once you receive a script for oral antivirals, you can visit the AzDHS website or contact the poison control hotline to find a retail pharmacy to fill it. That number is 844-542-8201.

As a reminder, Banner has discontinued the administration of other monoclonal antibody treatments as they have not been effective in treating patients infected with the Omicron variant.

I know that most of you have grown tired of masking, but it is still a very important tool to protect yourself and reduce the spread of COVID during these times of very high transmission. Please continue to wear a high-quality, fitted mask when you are in indoor public settings or around large crowds. N95 and KN95 masks provide the best protection.

Thank you for your time this morning. I am now happy to answer any questions that you have.