

# Dr. Marjorie Bessel Press Conference

## 1/11/22

Good afternoon. Today my opening remarks will be specific to our Arizona market. After a slight dip in volumes over the holidays – which was anticipated – we have started to see COVID hospitalizations pick up again. They have been on an upward trend since January 1. Nearly a third of our inpatient beds are now occupied by COVID or suspected COVID patients. Roughly 90% of those COVID patients are unvaccinated.

In addition to these concerning hospitalization trends, we are also experiencing challenges with staffing. There continues to be a national shortage of health care workers. Due to the prevalence of COVID in our community, our team members are also getting sick with the virus. This has resulted in further strain on our hospitals and urgent cares. Banner continues to follow CDC guidance on when it is safe to allow a health care worker to return to work following COVID infection. Banner maintains a structured return to work evaluation process to ensure the safety of our team members, patients and visitors.

Recently we have had to temporarily close some of our urgent care locations due to staff availability. This has resulted in longer wait times at the urgent cares that remain open. For this reason, we recommend that you check online to make sure the Banner Urgent Care location nearest you is open before you

arrive, and when possible, schedule your appointment online to reduce your wait time.

Accessing appropriate levels of care for your illnesses and injuries is very important. Utilize emergency rooms for life threatening issues and consider your primary care doctor or urgent care for less emergent needs. If you are unsure what level of treatment you require, there is a blog on [bannerhealth.com](https://www.bannerhealth.com) to help you with your choice. In addition, Banner offers an online symptom checker and a 24-hour nurse line that you may utilize for free at any time. Both resources can be found on our website.

My top ask of the community continues to be the same. It is for all who are eligible to get vaccinated and receive your boosters if you have not yet done so. This is the best way to prevent serious COVID illness that requires hospital-level care. In addition, please mask when you are indoors and stay home when you are ill. Fitted masks, such as KN95s, are suggested at this time due to the prevalence of this highly transmissible virus. Get tested as soon as possible if you experience COVID symptoms, and if you test positive, ask your doctor if you qualify for outpatient treatments such as IV monoclonal antibodies or oral antivirals.

Sotrovimab is a monoclonal antibody therapy used to treat COVID outside of the hospital. The drug is currently in short supply and is being distributed by federal and state governments. Banner is offering this treatment at three

locations in the Phoenix area and one in Tucson. It requires a referral from a doctor, so be sure to schedule an appointment with your PCP or at a Banner Urgent Care to be evaluated and see if you meet the criteria for treatment. Due to the limited supply at this time, not all eligible patients will receive the treatment.

Oral antivirals such as Paxlovid and Molnupiravir have also received emergency use authorization by the FDA for the treatment of individuals with mild to moderate COVID if a patient meets specific clinical criteria. These medications are also being distributed by federal and state governments to approximately 32 retail pharmacies throughout Arizona. At this time, Banner Family Pharmacy will not be included in that distribution. Like Sotrovimab, there is a limited supply of both drugs. You should see your PCP to be evaluated for these antivirals. If you meet criteria, your provider can write a prescription to have filled at one of the select pharmacies if there is supply.

Before I close out, I'd also like to ask the community to please be patient with us in the days and weeks to come. You may experience longer waits or delays due to the significant strain on our health care system. Please also be kind and respectful to your health care workers. They have been under immense pressure for the past two years and especially during this most recent surge.

We will continue to do our very best to deliver timely and appropriate care for all who need us. Thank you.