

Banner Health | 9-29 Press Conference Transcript_1

So our first question comes from Nicole Grigg at ABC 15 here in Phoenix. We are days away from the start of flu season. Flu season is expected to be worse, since we didn't have one last year. Are you concerned about resources, those of COVID and flu at the same time?

So, yes, we are concerned that going into the winter season. That the hospital systems will be very, very busy. As we've spoken about before, we're asking for everybody to help us to make sure that we can be available to everybody who needs us in our communities, both those patients that have COVID, those patients who may get influenza, and anybody else who does not have one of those infectious diseases. As always, we ask for your help with that. Please, if you're not vaccinated for COVID, go get a COVID vaccine now.

Also, as pointed out, influenza season will start. And we do expect it to be a fairly moderate to severe season, this upcoming winter. And influenza vaccinations are available. Anybody over the age of six months is encouraged by the CDC to become vaccinated. Banner Health will continue to get external contracted labor, and all of our employees, ready to be available for those patients that will need us in the upcoming months.

Our next question comes from Cole Lauterbach, who is the editor over at *The Center Square*. He asks, the summer monsoon season has increased mosquito activity and West Nile virus infections. Another hospital system has confirmed increased beds in use for West Nile-virus related illnesses. Is Banner saying something similar, any estimations?

So at this time, we really are not having the same experience as some of the other health care systems, where we are aware that they are having some increased cases of West Nile virus. As again, I would ask everybody out there to help us make sure that we remain available, as well as those other health care systems that appear to be having a fairly significant increase of that particular disease. If you're going outside and you live in an area that has a lot of mosquitoes, wear mosquito repellent. Also if you have a backyard or anywhere else where there's standing water, please try and make sure that you reduce that.

But again the message is the same. So that all health care systems are able to be available for you and your families that need us, please get vaccinated against COVID. And as we spoke about just a little bit ago, make sure that you're also planning to get your influenza vaccine this season as well.

Katie Davis Young with KJZZ Radio, here in Phoenix, asks do you have any updates on Banner employee vaccination rates, as you approach your deadline for employees to get vaccinated.

I do not have any updates today for how we are doing with our vaccination rates. As a reminder, our deadline for all of our employees to become vaccinated is November 1. And we expect, and are working with all of our employees, to be fully compliant with that deadline on November 1.

We continue to work with our employees, who are potentially going through a process, to request a medical or religious exemption, as well as with those employees who have not yet been vaccinated, or those employees who are partially-vaccinated. I expect that in November, we will be 100% compliant with our policy and will be happy to share that number with you when we get to our deadline.

Alexandra Perry with Tucson Local Media asks, just to clarify, is Banner offering booster shots on-site. Banner Health is not offering booster shots at this time. We are working with many of our local pharmacies, as an example, for both patients and employees who need vaccination. I would again encourage anybody who's out there, if you're unvaccinated against COVID-19, please go and schedule your vaccine appointment today. There's many appointments still available, as well as many locations that allow for walk-in.

Nicole Grigg with ABC 15 here in Phoenix asks three questions. I will ask you the first one. What resources are at risk for flu and COVID?

So the resources that can become strained when we are having things like COVID surge, as we have experienced several times during this pandemic, as well as increased winter volumes when influenza or other respiratory pathogens become more prominent, is that we can have a run on things like availability of timely ED visits, availability of inpatient beds.

At this time, we believe that the most constrained resource will be our very skilled staff. Those are our nurses, our respiratory therapists, other clinicians, and physicians. We've been sharing all along what we've been doing to recruit into our core positions, as well as to secure external contracted labor that comes from outside of the state, to help us in the state when we have the surge, and when we have upcoming winter-expected increased volumes.

All of you can help us make sure that we're here for you, your family, and your friends, whether it's COVID, flu or other non-COVID, non-flu, illnesses or diseases by getting vaccinated. Please if you're not vaccinated at this time against COVID-19, schedule your vaccine today. There's many available appointments with walk-in clinics still available as well. And again, as we've spoken about here this morning, influenza season is right around the corner. Influenza vaccines are available today, and please make sure that you're scheduling and planning to get that as well.

The second question from Nicole Grigg at ABC 15. Is staffing still a concern?

Yes. While we are experiencing what I would call a nice slow decline of the surge that we just experienced in most of the states where a Banner Health operates, our number one constraint is still staffing. Our staff have been fighting this pandemic for over a year and a half. And they are quite fatigued, and our volumes remain still high. We continue to recruit for those core positions that I mentioned earlier. And we are still bringing in external contracted labor to assist us both now, as well as in the upcoming weeks and months as we go into the winter surge season.

And the third question from Nicole Grigg at ABC 15, and Dr. Bessel you may have already answered this, but I will ask it again. What lack of resources are you facing right now? Yeah the lack of resources is really related to the skilled personnel that are at the bedside. So nurses, respiratory therapists, and other clinicians. That said, we do have many openings still posted for those that are looking for employment, and I recommend that anybody who's interested go to [bannerhealth.com](https://www.bannerhealth.com) to look at those job postings.