

Our next question comes from Stephanie Innes over at the Arizona Republic. The letter to the state health department from the Arizona Border Counties Coalition makes it sound like patient care is being compromised in rural hospitals due to overstressed hospitals. Is patient care being compromised right now in Banner hospitals due to higher than usual patient volume and staffing shortages?

So patient care at Banner hospitals is not still at its normal process. So with the COVID surge that we just experienced and those higher-than-anticipated, unseasonably high volumes that we are experiencing, it is impacting our normal operations. We continue to work very closely and very collaboratively with the surge line, as well as with our other hospital systems and partners within the state. We will continue to do that. But again, the problem is that we have right now is we have too many COVID patients in our hospitals.

I'm going to urge everybody who's listening, again, please help us so that we can be most available to everybody who needs us. Get yourself vaccinated against COVID-19 if you're not yet vaccinated. There's many openings available in a local pharmacy or a clinic near you, including walk-in availability at some places. In addition to that, plan ahead. We do expect to have high volume of patients this upcoming winter, as a combination of COVID plus flu plus all the other patients that need us. So make sure that you're planning ahead to get influenza vaccine, and help us make sure that we're available for you.

Our next question comes from Nicole Garcia with Fox 10 News here in Phoenix. Now, Nicole would like to know how we are dealing with West Nile virus at our hospitals. She says that we are seeing record high West Nile virus hospitalizations. How does West Nile hospitalizations compare to COVID hospitalizations within Banner?

So at Banner Health, we are not having the same level of West Nile inpatients as some of our other sister hospitals have in the state of Arizona. We have been working collaboratively with our County Department of Health Services, as well as the state, to make sure that everybody who is a clinician within our system has a high index of suspicion if somebody presents with symptoms that could be consistent with West Nile. Again, our biggest problem that is impeding our ability to get back to normal operations is actually the number of COVID patients that we have in our hospitals, which is now a vaccine-preventable illness. If you have not yet been vaccinated against COVID, I strongly urge you to do so as soon as possible.

The next question comes from Katie Davis-Young with KJZZ Radio here in Phoenix. Are your internal forecast models still projecting a rise in COVID cases this winter?

Yes. We are working with a number of different models to try and forecast what the future looks like, and those models are still showing that we will have an increase of cases in this upcoming winter. That said, there are variables that are very much under our control within our communities to help make that either not happen or happen to a lesser degree. It's called vaccination.

If you're not yet vaccinated against COVID-19, we strongly urge you to do so as soon as possible. In addition to that, some of those increased volumes that are going to affect us in the winter months will be related to influenza. Influenza vaccine is also available, and the CDC recommends everybody over the age of six months get vaccinated against that illness, as well.

Daniela Zavala with Univision here in Phoenix asks two questions. And I will ask you the first. How many of the people hospitalized currently with COVID are unvaccinated?

So I think I shared a graphic last week. And we can bring that graphic back after today's press conference. But our experience at Banner Health is very similar to the experience that's occurring across the country. Approximately 90% of patients who are hospitalized in Banner with COVID are unvaccinated. Approximately 90% of patients who are hospitalized with COVID in our ICUs are unvaccinated.

Approximately 90% of patients who are hospitalized with COVID and intubated on a ventilator in our hospitals are unvaccinated. It's clear from those statistics how efficacious the vaccines are. We ask everybody who's unvaccinated against COVID-19 to get vaccinated as soon as possible so you don't end up potentially getting infected and potentially needing hospital care in one of our hospitals.

The second question from Daniela Zavala with Univision, she asks if you can talk more about the Pfizer vaccine for kids between the ages of 5 and 11 years old, and when could there be a vaccine for children under the age of five.

So our understanding is that, through communications, that the Pfizer vaccine for those that are ages 5 to 11 is going to be evaluated during the month of October. And we expect to actually hear about that evaluation likely before Halloween. For individuals who are under the age of five, my understanding is that those studies are still ongoing, and do not have any date when scientific data might be available, and then submitted to the FDA and CDC for potential approval.

Our next question comes from Melanie MacEachern with the Hertel Report. She asks three questions, so I will ask you the first. With regard to the ongoing nursing slash worker shortage, could you speak to some specifics on how hiring practices have shifted since the shortage worsened during the pandemic?

So a couple of things I would say in regards to our hiring practices. We continue to recruit for core positions. If you're interested in potentially being employed by Banner Health, I encourage you to go to [BannerHealth.com](https://BannerHealth.com). And our recruiting department has been working very closely to recruit into those positions that we need and to work with individuals who are applying. In addition to that, we have brought in a lot of external contracted labor to supplement our core positions and those positions that we're hiring for. We are bringing in individuals almost every week, and continue to expect to do that throughout the winter busy season.

The second question that Melanie MacEachern from the Hertel Report asks, is Banner increasing recruitment from schools directly or are there any community engagement recruitment initiatives that Banner may want to highlight?

So Banner continues to post for our core positions, and anybody who's interested in those can go to our [BannerHealth.com](https://BannerHealth.com) site to see if one of those might meet your needs. In addition to that, our recruiting department is using a number of different tactics to help us recruit into those core positions. Some of those do include working directly with some of the schools that are training the next generation of care providers.

And the third question from Melanie MacEachern from the Hertel Report, have standards for potential employees changed, for example with regard to prior experience or professional references?

So Banner Health continues to post for our core positions, and we continue to work with the applicants that are coming to us. Banner Health always has a range of positions that include a range of experiences that are required to come into our core positions. We have multiple positions that are open now, and hopefully one of those might suit your needs. If you're interested, please apply at [BannerHealth.com](https://BannerHealth.com).