

# Dr. Marjorie Bessel Press Conference Aug. 10, 2021

In the week since my last press briefing, we have continued to see an increase in COVID emergency room visits, hospitalizations, ICU admissions and ventilator usage.

In addition to an increase in COVID ICU admissions in Arizona, the number of non-COVID patients in our ICUs is also high for a summer month. Currently we have 435 patients in our ICUs. To put that into perspective, we had 484 last year at the peak of the summer COVID surge.

Last week I shared with you that pediatric patients make up 5% of our total COVID hospital admissions. I wanted to elaborate on this statistic because there were some follow-up questions related to this. In the month of July, we had 71 COVID-positive pediatric patients admitted to Banner hospitals, which was double what we saw in the month of June. ICU admissions and ventilator usage are low for this age group and most of our COVID-positive pediatric patients only require progressive care rather than intensive care.

This does not mean that the virus cannot have a serious impact on children. We are seeing it already in other states like Louisiana, Florida and Texas where pediatric volumes have sharply risen due to COVID and an unseasonable spike in respiratory illnesses among children. Unlike what Banner has experienced thus far this summer, hospitals in other major metropolitan cities across the country have seen COVID

pediatric ICU admissions and ventilator usage increase dramatically this past month.

I know that many of you are concerned about kids going back to school. I want to stress that there are several steps that we can all take to keep kids safe in school. First, get vaccinated, and vaccinate your children if they are 12 years of age or older. The more of us who get vaccinated, the more we protect those who are too young to get vaccinated. If your child will participate in in-person learning this year, have them mask up in school. And finally, do not send your children to school if they are sick.

As with prior COVID surges, staffing will continue to be a top priority as we prepare for an increase in COVID hospitalizations as well as other seasonal illnesses like the flu, which will likely be much more of a factor this year due to the easing of mitigation measures like masking, which helped to suppress influenza last year. In addition to jobs that we have posted for our core staff, we are also hiring travel nurses to begin assignments this fall.

Before I open for questions, I would like to ask those of you in the community who have not yet received your COVID vaccine to do so as soon as possible. You can make a profound impact this surge by getting vaccinated. By doing so you will protect yourself as well as those around you from serious illness and death.

Please continue to mask when you are indoors and around others you do not live with. I ask you to do this regardless of your vaccination status, as we have learned in recent weeks that the Delta variant is highly transmissible.

Lastly, please get tested and isolate if you have symptoms that are suggestive of COVID infection. This includes even mild cold-like symptoms.

Thank you.