

Dr. Marjorie Bessel Press Conference Sept. 15

Good morning.

As I am sure you have seen on health department COVID dashboards, Banner markets have continued to experience a plateau in COVID hospitalizations in recent weeks. While we are pleased to no longer see exponential growth in our markets, I will point out that this is a very high plateau. The duration has extended for much longer than we saw in prior surges, when cases peaked and then quickly descended. I will also remind you that Banner's forecasting tools predicted a lengthy plateau followed by a continued increase of hospitalizations next month.

About 25% of Banner patients are hospitalized with COVID – a much higher percentage than other conditions we are currently treating. The vast majority of these patients are unvaccinated. COVID patients continue to require extensive care for prolonged periods, with the average length of stay for adults ranging from 7 to 8 days. This is longer than non-COVID patients who have an average length of stay of 4 to 5 days. In addition to COVID patients, Banner continues to care for an unseasonably high volume of non-COVID patients.

In recent weeks the Banner Poison and Drug Information Center has seen an increase in calls regarding the drug Ivermectin, which some people have started to take to treat or prevent COVID. During the month of August, Banner's poison

center managed 10 cases, some that were so severe that they required hospitalization. Ivermectin is not usually something that our poison center gets many calls about, so this is very concerning to us to see this growing trend.

I want to make very clear that Ivermectin is not an FDA-approved treatment for COVID. Clinical trials are ongoing to assess Ivermectin for COVID, but no clear findings have been released that confirm this drug as a safe or effective form of treatment for COVID. For this reason, it is not currently a drug that Banner hospitals or providers will prescribe.

Please speak with your primary care provider about treatment options for COVID, and do not attempt to purchase drugs like Ivermectin through unauthorized sources. As is the case with many drugs, there are risks associated with consuming them. This is especially true for high doses of Ivermectin such as the tablets that are intended for treatment of livestock, which can cause serious illness or death. Even the levels of Ivermectin approved for human use to treat non-COVID conditions can interact with other medications, leading to health complications.

For more information about Ivermectin, you can visit the FDA website.

As a reminder, we currently have a very effective form of treatment for COVID. Monoclonal antibodies received emergency use authorization from the FDA late last year and

have been proven to safely prevent hospitalizations and reduce severity of COVID symptoms. More information about monoclonal antibodies can be found on [bannerhealth.com](https://www.bannerhealth.com), including a list of sites where this treatment is offered and how to get referred.

As with all my press conferences, I will close out my opening remarks with an ask for all of you. Please get vaccinated as soon as possible. The COVID vaccines are safe and effective. They will significantly reduce your chances of being hospitalized or dying from COVID.

I know this has been a long and frustrating journey for many of you. Vaccination is the best way for us to put an end to this pandemic so that we can return to a more normal way of living – one where everyone has access to the medical care that they need, both COVID and non-COVID.

Thank you.