

# Dr. Marjorie Bessel Press Conference Sept. 1, 2021

Good morning.

Today I want to share some information with you regarding unvaccinated COVID patients in our hospitals, the effectiveness of the vaccine compared to immunity from prior infection and out-patient treatment that is currently available for those who become infected with COVID.

Of the COVID patients who are hospitalized at Banner, over 90% are unvaccinated. Most of these patients – two-thirds, in fact – continue to be between the ages of 20 to 65, which is quite different than prior surges when 50% of patients were over the age of 65. This shift can be attributed to high vaccination rates of the elderly as well as the Delta variant, which is the predominant strain found in the United States today – accounting for 99.1% of all virus circulating in this country.

This pandemic has become one of the unvaccinated, and I sincerely hope that Banner and others in the medical community will be able to persuade those who have not yet been vaccinated. It is one of the most important and life-saving decisions that you will make.

Vaccination continues to be the single best way to protect yourself from serious COVID illness. In fact, the CDC recently published information regarding immunity from vaccination

compared to that from prior infection. For those of you who have chosen not to get the vaccine because you've already had COVID, there is no scientific backing for your decision. There is, however, evidence that makes a case for the opposite – that those who have had a prior COVID infection should, in fact, get vaccinated.

Data is not yet available on how long someone is protected from COVID after they've recovered from COVID infection. What we do know is that severity of prior infection and variants impact the strength of infection-acquired immunity. Studies have shown that reinfection rates are 2.34 times more likely in those who remain unvaccinated, which is why vaccination is still recommended by the CDC and medical community even if you've had COVID.

You should wait to be vaccinated until you have recovered from your illness and met criteria for discontinuing isolation. In addition, if you were treated for COVID with monoclonal antibodies, you should wait 90 days before getting a COVID vaccine.

Monoclonal antibody therapy continues to be the most effective, FDA-approved treatment for COVID. To qualify for the treatment, you must be at least 12 years old and have mild to moderate COVID symptoms that began less than 10 days ago. Please get tested as soon as you start to experience symptoms to ensure you are eligible to receive this treatment within that window of time. In addition, you must be considered high risk

for serious illness, which includes anyone over the age of 65, those who are pregnant and those who have conditions that put them at greater risk, such as obesity, diabetes and hypertension. A full list of those conditions can be found on [bannerhealth.com](http://bannerhealth.com) or on the FDA or CDC websites.

I do not have any significant data to share with you today regarding COVID hospitalizations. We remain very busy caring for COVID and non-COVID patients. Staffing continues to be our biggest area of opportunity. Our staffing agencies have made great progress in securing out-of-state workers to support us during this surge. We have hundreds of new travel nurses and respiratory therapists going through orientation and starting their assignments at Banner facilities each week.

I know that pediatric COVID hospitalizations continue to be an area of interest for you and for good reason – we never want to see children hospitalized for complications from illnesses like COVID, especially when there are things that all of us can do to prevent transmission and protect vulnerable people in our communities. During the month of August, 412 pediatric patients at Banner hospitals were admitted or placed in observation with COVID or suspected COVID. This is higher than the month prior when we only saw 174 pediatric patients that were COVID positive or suspected COVID. As I have stated previously, most pediatric patients do not require ICU-level care or ventilators. This remains the case at our Banner hospitals. The number of pediatric patients in our ICUs remains very low.

I'll close out my opening remarks this morning as I always do, with my ask for all of you. Please get vaccinated as soon as possible. The vaccines are extremely effective in preventing serious illness and hospitalization.

Thank you.