

Banner Health | 9-8 Press Conference Transcript_2

Angela Gonzales with the *Phoenix Business Journal* asks several questions, so I will ask you the first. Her first question is in reference to nursing staff shortages. "How many nursing positions do you need to fill at Banner facilities in Arizona?"

So Banner Health continues to have many openings for nursing positions, as well as other important positions such as respiratory therapists. You can visit our BannerHealth.com if you're interested in joining us for your career and know that we continue to be in a hiring phase. In addition to that, to fill the gap that we have and to make sure that we have staffing to take care of those in our communities who need us, we will continue to bring in external contracted labor. We have nurses and respiratory therapists starting with us on almost every single week who get oriented and then go right out into our front lines to help take care of those who need us.

And I think you just answered her second question. She did ask about how things are going with travel nurse hiring. So I think you just answered that, correct?

Yes. So we continue to bring in external contracted labor for both nursing and respiratory therapists. We are bringing in individuals almost every single week and will continue to do so to augment our staffing.

And she also asks about the number of COVID-19 patients in all Banner Arizona hospitals. And she would also like to know how many of those total hospitalized patients, how many of them are in our ICUs?

So I'm going to give some specifics here for the Arizona marketplace and repeat some of the statistics that I said in an earlier answer to a question. So currently, we are caring for 522 ICU patients. ICU utilization across Banner Arizona's hospitals did increase over the past 24 hours.

Just as comparison, our peak ICU occupancy during the 2020 summer surge was 484, so we are well above that today. At this time, ventilator usage is increasing as well, with 211 COVID patients who are now requiring ventilatory support. That is representing 55% of our total ventilated patients.

Colleen Sikora from 12 News here in Phoenix asks several questions, so I'm going to ask you the first. This is a little lengthy, so I'll read this to you, Dr. Bessel. "We've heard you talk about monoclonal antibodies in the past and also today. Last week, the governor's office announced they'll provide extra staffing help to hospitals who provide monoclonal antibodies and offer vaccines to patients upon discharge."

The governor's office says they believe that this will help reduce hospitalizations, however, I know only specific people qualify. I know last week you said 2/3 of your patients are between the age of 20 and 65. Do you think that monoclonal antibodies would or are going to help reduce the hospitalizations?

So yeah. So we have spoken about monoclonal antibodies, and I did mention them here today. Certainly the literature shows that for those that meet criteria to be treated with monoclonal antibodies who test positive for COVID-19 that it can absolutely reduce the severity of the disease, as well as the need for hospitalization.

We have been providing monoclonal antibody treatment to patients for many, many months. And so far, we have treated over 5,700 patients. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you can go to our BannerHealth.com site to learn more information about how to receive that potential treatment. And we are offering at multiple sites, as I stated in my opening remarks.

All right. Colleen Sikora from 12 News asks a second question. "Is Banner Health providing both monoclonal antibodies and offering vaccines to patients upon discharge?"

So we do not provide monoclonal antibodies at discharge. So I just want to make sure I'm understanding the question correctly. We do provide monoclonal antibodies at multiple different sites for individuals that test positive for COVID-19 and meet the criteria that are needed to qualify for that treatment. If you would like information about monoclonal antibody treatment, you can go to BannerHealth.com and seek out more information.

We have been providing the service for many, many months, and so far have treated over 5,700 patients to date. At this time at the time of discharge for patients that are coming to a Banner Health facility, we are not providing COVID-19 vaccination. For those of you that are not yet vaccinated, including patients that might be being discharged from any of our facilities, our clinics or emergency departments, we do offer information about where you can get COVID-19 vaccination close to you.

As we know, COVID-19 vaccination is very readily available out in our communities. It's available in many local pharmacies, as well as pharmacists that are located in grocery stores. Some of these entities are providing walk-in opportunity for you to go ahead and get vaccinated. If they do not have walk-in opportunity, there are many, many appointments available each and every day. Go ahead and sign yourself up online wherever is close to you, a local pharmacy or a local pharmacy that's within one of the grocery stores near you.

And then the third question from Colleen Sikora here at 12 News, earlier she had talked about the governor's office announcing that they'll provide extra staffing to help hospitals who provide monoclonal antibodies. She would like to know "how many staff are you all expecting from the governor's recent allocation of money for this?"

So just to clarify our understanding of that particular activity is that there is not money coming to health systems, but there is assistance in getting additional staff to help staff hospitals who, of course, we are all feeling the effects of the surge that we've been talking about. At this time, Banner Health did not ask for that assistance from the state.

All right. Next question comes from Olivia McCann over at *Cronkite News* here in Phoenix. "What percent of hospitalized COVID patients are unvaccinated at Banner hospitals?"

So I believe we shared those statistics at a previous press conference, which was about 90% of hospitalized patients within Banner are unvaccinated.

Nicole Garcia with Fox 10 here in Phoenix asks, "Does it appear that this current surge has peaked and are we on our way down?"

So I'm going to go back to my opening comments where I spoke about the fact that at this time it does appear that we have stabilized and perhaps are hitting a plateau. However, that just means that we also are not experiencing exponential growth, which we have been experiencing for many weeks prior to that. This was also the case for the pediatric COVID hospitalizations.

But in addition to that, I want to draw attention to my opening remarks about the forecasting models that Banner Health has looked at, which predict that hospitalizations would probably slow around this time. But it also predicts that we will experience substantial increases in the upcoming months.

So what does that mean for all of us? It means that we need your help. Please go ahead and get yourself vaccinated if you have not yet done so for COVID-19. In addition to that, remember that influenza season is about to descend upon us. And so flu vaccinations are best if gotten in September and October to give yourself maximal coverage.

Kelly Ragan with the *NoCo Optimist*, a publication up in northern Colorado, asks two questions, so I will ask the first. "What's your take on the situation in the northern Colorado region?"

Yes. Thank you. I'll provide a few more statistics that we have about the northern Colorado area. So northern Colorado remains very busy, just like in all of the other markets that I've been speaking about. COVID and suspected COVID admissions have somewhat stabilized and flattened over about the last eight days.

Ventilator usage for COVID patients, however, has increased over the last five days. Pediatric COVID admissions in the NoCo market remain low. And at this time, there are no pediatric patients who have tested positive for both RSV and COVID in the entire Western region, which includes the NoCo region.

And then the second question from Kelly Ragan at the NoCo Optimist, "How would you say COVID numbers compare to Arizona COVID numbers at this point?"

So Colorado has been having lesser numbers compared to Arizona. But again, I would just caveat all of that when we talk about one market compared to another market. As we are seeing across the entire United States, the surge affects different markets in different ways.

So we've all been seeing and watching what's been happening in the southeastern part of the United States where states like Florida and Texas have been particularly hard hit. Arizona has been in an exponential growth curve for the last number of weeks, and we've just started to reach a plateau. Northern Colorado numbers are a little bit behind what the Arizona market is experiencing. So we need to make sure that we're following those numbers market by market and be aware of the fact that the entire country does not necessarily have the exact same surge experiences.

And we have to make sure that we're looking locally. That said, what we all can do to help all health care systems across the entire United States, including all the markets that Banner Health serves, is to get vaccinated. Protect yourself, get a COVID vaccine. Influenza season is about to descend upon us, and it's time to get our influenza vaccinations as well. September and October are ideal months for us to go ahead and get vaccinated to get maximal coverage against influenza.

Angela Gonzalez from the *Phoenix Business Journal* asks, "Could you please be more specific and provide an actual number of nursing positions you need?"

I do not have those numbers with me specifically here today. I'm just going to repeat a couple of things related to your questions. So number one, we are very busy. Number two, as I stated in my opening comments about our forecasting model, we expect to be very busy and more busy than we are currently.

We have openings for our core positions for both nurses, as well as other individual team members that are very important to the care of our patients in our hospitals. You can go to [BannerHealth.com](https://www.bannerhealth.com) for that. We continue to bring in external contracted labor, both for nurses and respiratory therapists, to augment our staff.