Banner Health | Bessel interview

Dr. Marjorie Bessel. M-A-R-J-O-R-I-E Bessel. B as in boy- E- S- as in Sam- S as Sam- E-L.

Perfect. So, Dr. Bessel, just walk us through exactly this glimmer of hope of what is the COVID-19 vaccine.

So as we like to say, the vaccine is the beginning of the end of the pandemic. It is absolutely the bright spot on the horizon for us. Especially now, as we have so much COVID activity, uncontrolled activity, happening in all of our communities.

So here today, I'm at one of our vaccination pods. This one is a Banner run pod, it happens to be at the state fairgrounds. We have multiple distribution sites throughout the state, and several of which, in many different counties that Banner Health is operating and distributing vaccine. For here, this is a mass vaccination site, which means that we're processing a lot of people as they come through.

And we're doing them while they're in their car. So you can see behind me, that we have several lanes of traffic, that are weaving their way through the entire process. When you drive on to the fairgrounds here, you will be greeted. And we always make sure that you have an appointment.

So we do need everybody to have an appointment before they come on to the fairgrounds. After that, you're going to go through a registration process to make sure we have all of your appropriate data. Because we are obviously, reporting how many people are getting vaccine here.

And then you'll go through your forms to make sure that you don't have a contraindication to receiving the vaccine. Or if you're in a special category, that perhaps we need to have a physician consultation with you. That could include things like somebody who is pregnant, a woman who is breastfeeding, somebody who's on immunosuppressive agents.

Obviously, people who have just had COVID or might have received antibody treatment for COVID. All of those individuals will need to have consultation to make sure that now is the appropriate time for them to get vaccinated. Once you go through all of that, then you're going to come into one of our lanes over here, and you're going to pull right up to the vaccine site.

Our vaccine is stored at a really cool temperature, we're using Pfizer vaccine here, it's minus 80 degrees Celsius. We have a team of pharmacists that are very specifically thawing vaccine the day ahead of time, and then reconstituting the vaccine to be here just for you. So we asked everybody, if you have an appointment, please do show up, because we've got a syringe, a vaccine, made especially for you.

And then once you pull in, that vaccine, that syringe that's made especially for you, is going to be prepared. The person who's going to administer vaccine to you is going to double check, make sure that we know who you are, that your birthdate is accurate. And we're going to give you a card, your card is your documentation that you received vaccine.

When you come back for the second vaccine, bring that card with you, because then we're going to document that you got your second vaccine. This is going to be really important. As vaccine continues to roll out, and life starts to get more back to normal in the second part of 2021, you may actually need that card to do things like, travel.

If you want to go out of the country, you might need to prove that you've been vaccinated. It's going to be a very, very important part, so we ask everybody takes special attention to make sure you keep it in a safe place. And maybe even with your smartphone take a picture of it, so you store it somewhere else as well in case it does end up getting misplaced.

When you're ready to get the vaccine, we're going to ask you-- sometimes we ask you, to open up your car door so it's just easier for the vaccinator to lean in and get that to you. Obviously, we're going to clean your arms so that it's very sterile. The needle that we're using here, is actually really small.

I've been vaccinated. I have to tell you, I could not even feel the needle going into my arm. It's really, really tiny and it's very, very quick. Most everybody does fine. There's very little, if any bleeding from the injection site.

And then what we're going to do, is we're going to put a sticker on your windshield, that's going to save the time that you've got vaccinated. And we watch you for at least 15 minutes in our observation lane, so you'll pull out here, and then you're going to drive slowly over to the observation lanes.

In our observation, lanes we have individuals who are roving throughout there, checking to make sure you're doing OK. Anybody who feels like they're having any symptoms at all, they're going to honk their horn. That's the signal that our team, which includes nurses and doctors, if needed, will come and assess you.

We do have emergency equipment on hand, as well as medications, in case you are actually having an allergic reaction we can treat you immediately. Once you've gone through that time period, it's 15 minutes for those of us that don't have significant allergies. It's 30 minutes if you have a significant allergy in your history, we watch you for a little bit longer to keep you safe.

Once you've gone through that observation time, you drive off and your vaccination process on site is ended. Now, I think it's important to talk a little bit about side effects. In medical terms, it's often referred to as reactogenicity. It's a fancy term for side effects from the vaccine.

Any vaccine can give you side effects, the COVID-19 vaccine can have side effects, actually in quite a number of us. But it can be really mild for many, many people. Things like just soreness at the site where you got the injection, sometimes a little bit of fever, chills, muscle aches, headache those are all things that can be very normal as your body is reacting to the vaccine. And your body is doing what it needs to, which is make antibodies to protect you from getting infected and getting ill from the COVID virus.

Generally, those symptoms are done within 48 hours. And again, they're very variable. What we are hearing now that we're on our second round of dosing of this vaccine, is that people are reporting that the second dose may produce a few more symptoms than the first dose. It's really variable, we don't know how to predict who's going to have mild versus more moderate, or even severe symptoms.

The good thing is, it almost always goes away within 48 hours. Mine was pretty mild, I just got my second vaccine a little while ago, and I did schedule myself really light that next day. So that's another thing that for those of you that are getting your second dose, think about can you not be working that next day. Or if you are working, can you schedule light?

Can you work from home? If you don't always work from home, could that be one of the days that you can work from home? Just kind of take it easy on yourself, just in case your symptoms are such that they're impeding your ability to be at your 100% work environment.

Mine were pretty mild, but I did have a lot of chills. And I was really glad that I scheduled light, I was able to work from home that day. And I woke up the very next day after that and what I was perfect, I was fine, everything was over with.

And I would just remind all of us , that the symptoms that probably any of us are ever going to have from the vaccine, are going to be really small compared to what could happen to us if we actually got COVID and became significantly ill. The problem with COVID, is you can get very ill, and you can be ill for a very long time.

So when you compare that to a couple of symptoms that are likely going to go away in 24 to 48 hours from a vaccine. Of course, all of us would recommend that you go with the vaccine route. It's much safer, it's going to cause you much less symptoms than taking a risk that could actually become very, very ill with COVID.

In addition to that, we need so many of us to get vaccinated to bring our COVID-19 activity under control. Here in the state of Arizona, we are in uncontrolled spread at this time. And so we need to vaccinate as fast as possible, especially those populations that are very vulnerable to this disease. So we'll be moving to those individuals that are over the age of 65 here very shortly, we're already doing those that are greater than 75.

So if you've got a relative, a grandma, a grandpa, an aunt, an uncle, a neighbor, who is in that vulnerable population, let's help them. Help them navigate to get their appointment, help them make sure they understand what's going to happen here at the vaccine sites. And let's help them and encourage them to come get vaccinated. So we can protect our most vulnerable populations out there.

And then as soon as this vaccine center is opening up to the greater population, I know a lot of parents are concerned about it. What message do you want to give the parents of young kids and teenagers all that sort too.

Yeah so at this time, the two vaccines that we have available are Pfizer and Moderna. One is for 18 and over, one is for 16 and over. So for those individuals that are less than that age, we do not have an indication for a vaccine for them yet at this time.

We know that scientists and the pharmaceutical industry is working really hard to bring us more vaccine. Not only do we need more vaccine to vaccinate everybody in our country so we can bring this virus under control. But we need vaccine for different populations, and children is one of them. We don't have really anything for children at this time.

So what I would say is if you're a parent out there, obviously, of course, you're very concerned about your children. Get yourself vaccinated when your time comes, so that you can protect yourself and that helps protect your family. And we will absolutely here Banner Health, working collaboratively with our counties and our states, continue to bring timely information to you, about new vaccines that become available. And if and when they are applicable to special populations like children.

Perfect. The last question I have for you, and then you can add anything on. There's a lot of misconceptions that the vaccine contains COVID itself, and then that's where a lot of people are saying that this is going to give me long term effects. What message do you have for that misconception?

So at this time, the two vaccines that we have available in the United States are Pfizer and Moderna, they are both technically called mRNA vaccines, they have no COVID in them. There is no COVID virus in them at all, you cannot get COVID from the COVID vaccine.

So if you're concerned about that, I want to put that myth completely off to the side, and say that is absolutely impossible to happen. Now as we get additional vaccines that may be different than an mRNA vaccine, some of those will be developed in a different process.

And we will bring you updated information about how they're made, what specific populations they can be utilized for. And if there's anything new or different about how they're given, or what side effects they might have, we will bring that information to you.

Perfect.

So you touched on this a little bit already but, you we're talking to Dr. Fallon about if you may have some more pronounced side effects. Just talk about what to do if you're not sure of whether these are side effects or might be something else.

So one of the things that can happen while we're still vaccinating individuals in our community, is it is still possible to get COVID after you get your vaccine. So let's walk through that, when you get your first vaccine. So let's walk through what can happen when you get your vaccine, and when you still can be at risk for getting COVID.

So first of all, we want everybody to get vaccinated when they can, when their population is ready to get vaccinated per county and state regulations. After you get your first COVID vaccine, it takes a good seven days to really get up to antibody protection. And you're only going to be maybe half of the way there from full protection, that you will get a couple of weeks after your second dose.

So here's the thing, symptoms that you get after your COVID vaccine are generally mild to moderate and they last for 24 to 48 hours. If you happen to be unfortunately incubating the virus when you came to get your shot, it's possible you could start having symptoms from a COVID infection around the same time when you might also be getting symptoms from your vaccine.

If your symptoms after vaccine are lasting more than 48 hours and are not getting better, that's when you have to think about wow, maybe I actually have something else going on other than just symptoms from vaccine. We've had people get COVID unfortunately, because they were incubating on the day they got vaccine. And so we start testing them on like day three, day four, if their symptoms are either progressing or just not getting better.

So you can still get COVID between dose number one and dose number two. Now, the same thing can happen after dose number two, it takes you a couple of weeks to get to that full. And remember these vaccines, they're awesome they're 95% effective. But it takes your body a couple of weeks to build up all those antibodies.

So after you get the second dose, the same thing could unfortunately possibly occur. Even though you still have some protection from dose number one, if you start having symptoms after your second dose of vaccine that lasts more than 48 hours, and it's either getting worse or not getting better, you have to think about, hey is something else going on?

See your physician, have a consultation with your physician, and perhaps you need to get tested for COVID. And make sure that you're not in that unfortunate category where you just didn't get quite enough protection from your vaccination yet, to keep you from getting COVID. Again, I say if you take a look at what can happen with COVID, versus the mild to moderate symptoms you're going to get from the vaccine, I would encourage all of us to weigh on the side of go and get your vaccine as soon as your time is ready. So that you can protect yourself and really minimize the risk of you getting COVID-19 disease.

Perfect. Beautifully well said.

Always so eloquent, that was beautiful.

Thank you!

You're all set.

Anything else, or are you all good?

Should I just do something to say thank you to our health care heroes who are going first to get vaccinated?

Yeah, I think we could, because that way we could use that for social. So, yes.

So any time I have an opportunity to say anything out there to all of you that are listening or wanting information, I want to do a big thank you to all of our health care heroes who are on the front line. Some of them are working here today, working hard to actually vaccinate you. Some of them are working hard here today out in the observation lane to make sure you're safe after your vaccine.

And remember, many of them went first and were vaccinated early in the vaccination process. So they could protect themselves, keep themselves healthy, so they can be here for you and all of us. Thank you front line health care heroes. Thank you all of you that are working on the Banner front lines today, we're so appreciative for everything that you do.