Banner Health

Banner Health Provides COVID-19 Update

Chief Clinical Officer fields questions asked by news outlets

PHOENIX (June 25, 2020) – As confirmed cases of COVID-19 continue to rise throughout Arizona, frontline health care workers at Banner Health continue to expand treatment areas for patients affected by the novel coronavirus and prepare for a possible surge of additional patients. Marjorie Bessel, MD, chief clinical officer of Banner Health, answered a series of questions Thursday submitted by multiple news outlets across Arizona and the country. Above all, Dr. Bessel asks the public's help in preventing the spread of the coronavirus by keeping distance from others, masking while in public and thoroughly washing hands frequently.

"I wear my mask when I'm out and about, and I think it's really important for everybody else to do the same," Dr. Bessel said. "It's also important to make sure the mask is working well for you and for others."

Dr. Bessel recommends every Arizonan use a cloth face covering when in public, which is well fitted to the user's face in order to fit snugly over their nose and mouth. Masks with one-way valves do not protect others from the user and, as such, are banned in some parts of Arizona, including Maricopa County.

Video and transcript of Dr. Bessel's full interview available for download

At any given time, Banner Health is treating about half of the patients in Arizona hospitalized with COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, teams have been load balancing across the system's network of hospitals so no single facility is overwhelmed. Dr. Bessel said Banner Health is doing all it can to avoid exceeding its surge capacity, and that is why the public's help in curbing the spread is paramount.

"We are absolutely experiencing a surge of COVID-19 patients that are coming in for care, and we are starting to get full," she said. "We do have plans, however, to continue to increase our capacity so that we can meet the demand of the communities and all the people that we serve in there. But we do ask everybody to follow all the things that we can do to try and reduce the curve of spread."

Banner Health is deploying more than 200 registered nurses, brought in via a contractor, to its Arizona hospitals to aid Banner Health team members. This is part of the organization's surge plan, which has been in development since January in anticipation of patient needs exceeding existing staffing capabilities.

"They have ICU experience; they have PCU experience," Dr. Bessel said. "Some of them have even worked in New York. So we're augmenting our staff, and we have some more coming next week, as well, to assist us."

Additionally, Banner Health is working in partnership with the Arizona Department of Health Services and Sonora Quest Labs to test Arizonans who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 or may have been exposed to a person diagnosed with COVID-19. However, Dr. Bessel said, testing capacity is limited to about 1,000 people a day.

"If you think you've been exposed, so for instance a co-worker or maybe even somebody in your own family has tested positive, you can go to one of the collection sites, as well," Dr. Bessel said. "Even if you're not yet having symptoms, make an appointment, go to the collection site, and you can be tested."

Results take about five to seven days to return from the lab, Dr. Bessel said. For hospitalized patients, which are the priority of health care providers statewide, COVID-19 specimens take about 24 hours to process.

"If you're symptomatic and you get a test, you should not be going to work," she said. "You should not be going out and about and potentially infecting people. So we ask you to take care of yourself, manage your symptoms, stay hydrated, get plenty of sleep."

Arizonans seeking a test for COVID-19 are encouraged to visit the Arizona Department of Health Services at http://azhealth.gov/covid19testing to find a location nearest them.

As one of the largest nonprofit health care systems in the country, the team at Banner Health is committed to ensuring all Banner locations are a safe place for care. Headquartered in Phoenix, Banner Health owns and operates 28 acute-care hospitals and an array of other services, including: Banner Imaging, Banner Telehealth and Banner Urgent Care. Team members are dedicated to protecting the health and safety of patients, be it a routine checkup, elective surgery or an urgent health service. Waiting room and employee workstation layouts maintain proper social distancing; screenings are conducted at hospital entrances to verify that all employees and visitors are well; and, all Banner physicians are equipped to visit patients remotely. Learn more about Banner's commitment to safety at bannerhealth.com/safecare.

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