

For Immediate Release

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New research shows COVID-19 link to heart damage

Banner Health experts encourage athletes of all ages to get cardiac screenings post COVID-19 recovery

PHOENIX (September 10, 2020) – Banner Health experts are encouraging cardiac screenings for student-athletes as new research has revealed potential heart damage as an after effect from the virus. A study published on *bioRxiv* shared new findings where novel coronavirus can cause harm in the way the heart functions thanks to the body's inflammation, sparking concerns about the potential for heart failure among COVID-19 survivors.

"Recent cases are showing that athletes who have overcome a viral infection such as COVID-19 can result in an inflammatory response that can potentially cause structural damage to the heart," said Steven Erickson, MD, medical director for [Banner Sports Medicine and Concussion Specialists](#).

This inflammation is better known as myocarditis (my-oh-car-DYE-tis) which is usually caused by a viral infection and is becoming more common among student-athletes who have recovered from COVID-19. Myocarditis can affect the heart muscle and its electrical system, reducing the heart's ability to pump, causing rapid or abnormal heart rhythms, also known as arrhythmias. This can be dangerous for athletes especially for those who play competitive sports.

Video: [Interviews and transcripts with Drs. Erickson and Perez](#)

Michael Perez, MD, pediatric cardiologist for [Banner Children's](#) adds that COVID-19 isn't just impacting the pulmonary system for those patients who are hospitalized, but it is also creating health issues for those people who have fully recovered from the virus.

"We are seeing patients with signs of inflammation and scar formation in their heart even after recovery," said Dr. Perez.

If a patient is a competitive athlete who will be training or participating in an upcoming sports season and had COVID-19, Dr. Perez recommends they seek an evaluation with their primary care physician or sports medicine specialist to see if they need additional evaluation by a cardiologist.

"We are recommending athletes of all ages who have been sick for more than three days with COVID-19 to get an EKG (an electrocardiogram) to screen for myocarditis before clearing them to play," said Dr. Erickson. "All athletes should be symptom-free for at least 14 days before resuming sports and should gradually resume activities while monitoring them for cardiac symptoms."

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 www.bannerhealth.com/safecare.

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