

Issues & Ideas

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Withrow, unmasked – why Stanislaus chairman defies state COVID mandate

BY GARTH STAPLEY
gstapley@modbee.com



Maybe the trick to avoiding disappointment with Stanislaus County supervisors' COVID-19

updates is lowering expectations.

Evidently, it's too much to expect that the county's highest elected officers would focus their monthly message — during the deadliest crisis in our county's history — on the things that people desperately want and need to know. Like access to testing.

What we got instead Tuesday was a multimedia presentation on what one man thinks we



Terry Withrow

need to know. Terry Withrow, this year's chairman of the Board of Supervisors, thinks it's important for us to know about monoclonal antibodies. He wants everyone to be aware of antiviral therapeutic treatments for virus sufferers.

Viewers tuning in to Tues-

day's board meeting got scant information on where they might go for scarce tests that thousands need for work, school and peace of mind. We instead were treated to a lengthy lecture about molnupiravir, paxlovid, sotrovimab, fluvoxamine and remdesivir. Be still my heart.

While government agencies on all levels explain the merits of KN95 masks over cloth ones, Withrow led Tuesday's meeting without any face covering at all.

Twelve other leaders and officials participating on the dais or adjacent to it wore masks, as required by the state mandate for everyone in public. But Withrow somehow is above that.

If you're a regular observer of local government, this is no surprise.

WITHROW'S LONGHELD DEFIANCE

A year ago, I called out Withrow in a Modesto Bee editorial and in an opinion column, noting the hypocrisy of sitting up there unmasked while lobby signs and his agency's agendas demanded that everyone in the room wear one. Soon after,

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Local doctors share how women can stay safe from COVID during pregnancy

BY LAUREN KENDALL BROWN-BERCHTOLD AND SHANI HANH TRUONG
Special to The Modesto Bee



Nearly two years have gone by since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time of uncertainty, misinformation has run wild, and many of us aren't sure what to believe. We want our patients and community to have access to trustworthy data.

Unfortunately, pregnant people are especially vulnerable to COVID-19. If they get sick, they are more likely to have severe disease requiring hospitalization, supplemental oxygen, assistance with breathing from a machine and death. There is also an increased risk of early delivery and a possible increased risk of death of the unborn baby.

Pregnant women are also at higher risk of long-term symptoms after COVID that may last eight or more weeks. Although children less than one year old seem to be at lower risk from COVID, they still can get sick and potentially spread COVID to other family members or friends.

Fortunately, there are three different COVID vaccines available in the United States.

Two of these vaccines, Moderna and Pfizer, use a new technology to allow the body to recognize COVID and later fight this illness more effectively. These vaccines require two doses and a follow-up booster. They are more than 90% effective at preventing severe COVID disease, keeping pregnant wo-



CHANELLE SMITH-WALKER Provided by Kelcy Walker Pope

Pregnant women should be vaccinated against COVID-19, say two local doctors and national experts.

men out of the hospital and preventing death.

The Pfizer vaccine has re-

ceived full FDA approval and the Moderna vaccine is under FDA emergency use autho-

rization. These vaccines are safe for pregnant women and unborn babies. The most common side

effects are tiredness, muscle aches, arm pain at the injection site, headache, chills, fever and nausea.

The third vaccine, from Johnson & Johnson, uses a technology similar to that used for the flu vaccine and is more than 70% effective at preventing severe disease. This vaccine is a single dose and should be followed up with a booster.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is also considered safe for pregnant women and unborn babies. There have been reports of blood clots in the brain associated with Johnson & Johnson which required investigation, but these are extremely rare. However, this might be something to consider when choosing a vaccine. Johnson & Johnson's vaccine also has FDA emergency use authorization.

ARE VACCINES SAFE DURING BREASTFEEDING?

Both the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine, two leading organizations that represent physicians in obstetric care, recommend all pregnant individuals be vaccinated during COVID-19.

Vaccination is safe in any stage of pregnancy, as well as being safe before and after pregnancy, especially compared to the risk of COVID-19 infection in an unvaccinated person. COVID vaccines are also safe for breastfeeding mothers.

There is no evidence that any of these vaccines cause fertility problems in men or women. There is evidence that vaccination during pregnancy builds antibodies that are passed on to the baby, which might protect them against illness after birth.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding and are not yet vaccinated against COVID-19, make an appointment with your doctor to discuss your options for protection today.

Doctors Lauren Kendall Brown-Berchtold and Shani Hanh Truong practice family medicine at San Joaquin General Hospital and clinics affiliated with the Health Plan of San Joaquin Provider Network serving 390,000 Medi-Cal members across Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties.

Depression, doomerism widespread in the US

BY ROBIN EPLEY
repley@sacbee.com



There's a crack in my windshield. Every time I get in my car, I see it out of the corner of my eye. I never seem to have the gumption to move it up on my list of things to do, so the crack just sits there; a constant,

nagging reminder of ineptitude.

Except, I'm not actually inept. I'm a functioning adult. A crack in the windshield, while annoying (and somewhat illegal), doesn't rank as high as paying the bills on time. And I manage to do that — if not with alacrity — then at least relative timeliness.

What a perfect metaphor for life in 2022.

Once routine tasks are now an incessant reminder of failure. Many of us escape to social media, which can present distorted pictures of lives that can seem perfect on the screen and

so inspire a sense of melancholy. I'm hardly alone in feeling sadder: Researchers have found increased levels of anxiety and self-loathing since the onset of the pandemic not only in teens but also in adults.

This is depression, I hear you say, and you're right. Depression is higher than ever in America since the pandemic began. I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety in 2018, though truthfully, I struggled with it long before then. I've been on anti-depressants — or my "anti-sads" as I like to call them — ever since.

The more often I talk about my mental health struggles, the more I find other people willing to talk to me about theirs. Even now, when everything can feel lonely and overwhelming, we can make a rare connection

through shared experiences. It's scary to talk about this on such a public scale, but I hope that if you're reading this right now, you feel a little less alone, too. (And if you are, then it was worth it.)

Personally, I find comfort in knowing I'm not the only one feeling sad. One study found that the rate of depression in American adults is three times higher now than it was before the pandemic began. More than 2.5 million youth in the U.S. struggle with severe depression, and youth of color are at greatest risk: More than 10% of American children have severe, major depression, but the rate of severe depression was highest among youth who identified as more than one race, at 14.5%.

To young adults like me, it seems that every day we hear of

a worsening climate, politicians playing performative games to avoid new responsibility, a pandemic nearing one million deaths, and ongoing racial and class inequalities that never are fully addressed, no matter how we plead or fight. There are so many wrongs with the world, and it's too easy to believe we will never recover. So why bother trying?

Except, we have to keep trying.

At least, I do. I recognize that I have incredible privileges, but I also know depression doesn't care about that. My mom, who struggled with food insecurity as a child, used to say it doesn't matter if the glass is half empty or half full, she was happy the glass had anything in it at all. I

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