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is generally accepted as around 75 percent. However, having *anyone* vaccinated represents a key difference from previous attempts at reopening, when subsequent surges led state officials to reimpose restrictions.

"I'm cautiously optimistic, but that all depends on how people embrace getting COVID vaccines," said Dr. Marcia Nelson, a family practice physician in Chico and Enloe Medical Center's vice president of medical affairs. "The COVID vaccines have proven to be extraordinarily effective; they're also very, very safe."

"We owe it to ourselves and we owe it to our community—we owe it to the people that we love—to get our vaccines."

## Seeking clarity

The biggest health-related concern for restaurants and retailers has been uncertainty. The Bear's Keith, and Katy Thoma, president/CEO of the Chico Chamber of Commerce, both said that businesses have found themselves on shifting sands due to fast-issued updates. They feel more confident approaching June 15, with the caveat of the past year.

"I think now it's pretty clear nothing is going to change until June 15," Thoma said by phone, "but that's a few weeks. We're not sure of anything. But I don't think things are going to change all that much operationally."

With the chamber serving as a conduit of information from Public Health to businesses, Thoma has kept current on the regulations and in contact with business owners. She's had no significant revisions to communicate in months, she said, and local establishments have relayed few concerns ahead of the reopening.

Keith anticipates questions about face coverings in particular, since California, including Butte County, continued the face-covering mandate after the CDC relaxed its recommendation last month. (Check [buttecounty.net/publichealth/buttoreopens](http://buttecounty.net/publichealth/buttoreopens) for the latest.)

"We've experienced confusion, depending

on the customer, the last 15-plus months," Keith said. "That's nobody's fault other than there's changing information daily. So, I would expect that there will continue to be confusion; our goal is just to communicate to our employees and to our guests, as nicely as possible and as clearly as possible, what the current operating environment is."

PHOTO BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Worse than confusion, though, is reversion. Keith said he hopes the June 15 reopening sticks—that there isn't another shutdown or constriction. "Those experiences are more painful," he added, "starting and stopping."

Health officials obviously want to avoid that dire condition as well. Dr. Linda Lewis, Butte County Public Health's epidemiologist, told the CN&R that she's concerned about the impacts of another surge.

"The more cases we have, the more likely we're going to have variants emerge that may be more difficult to deal with," she said, "and the more likely we are to lose people."

Nelson said Enloe already has surge scenarios in place and, come the reopening, patients at the hospital and its clinics should notice no difference in procedures. She also noted that surges have tended to follow two weeks from broad exposure, such as a holiday. She'd already marked her mental calendar to check case numbers after Memorial Day weekend and the Fourth of July—now she's adding June 15 to her list.

"It's like you're standing at the ocean watching the waves come in," Nelson said, adding: "We can do it right or we can do it wrong, this reopening. Doing it right means getting our vaccines—otherwise we're leaving ourselves vulnerable and running the risk of spreading serious, often lethal illness to people we care about. So we can do it right or we can do it wrong." □