

# Actionable Steps to Reduce the Risk of Disease Transmission at 4-H Events

3/10/20

4-H Leaders,

I wanted to let you know that I am closely following the coronavirus outbreak. There has been one confirmed case in our county (Yolo), but this person is currently in isolation. The County Medical Director, Dr. Ron Chapman, also stated however that there is evidence of community transmission. This means increased safety and precautions are necessary. We will be following the guidance of our local, state, and national health authorities. At this time, no schools in our county have been closed, nor has there been any edict for cancelling events or activities. Therefore, we will continue our 4-H programming as planned. We will continue to monitor the situation in our community and may modify this guidance as conditions change.

However, I do encourage you to increase your sanitary practices at all gatherings. If we can help prevent the spread of any illness, that is a good thing to do. This is also an opportunity to teach our youth about microbiology, epidemiology, social responsibility, so please feel that you can discuss these topics at your meetings. If you need additional information to share with your clubs, please let us know.

Here are some actionable steps you can take to reduce the risk of spreading diseases at your 4-H events and meetings. The underlying message for most of them is to reduce the touching of shared items. They might not all be reasonable, so choose which things make the most sense for your situation. We do not want to induce panic, but do want to educate our youth on good hygiene habits. Many of these items, no one would even notice you had made a change.

- Relax attendance policies.
  - We need to relax policies about attending meetings and events. If a child, or close family member of a child, is sick, they should be excused from participating. This absence should not count against their qualifications for other activities such as Spring Show. Right now, we need to be as flexible as possible with attendance and avoid the situation where someone feels they need to attend a meeting or event, even if they are sick or at risk of illness.
- Consider the beverage items.
  - If you traditionally serve juice from a gallon container, where multiple people touch the bottle, can you switch to individual juice boxes?
  - Are you serving lemonade from a giant push-button cooler, where everyone touches the button? Can you designate an adult to serve the beverage, so only one person is touching it?
- Consider the food items.
  - Are you serving a buffet with a shared serving utensil? Can you offer individual food items instead? Or have a designated server?
  - Are you serving foods in a bag or box, like chips or crackers, where people are reaching in and touching it? Can you put it into individual cups or napkins instead ahead of serving?
  - Do you have sufficient garbage containers for any increase in packaging, so that items that have been touched and licked are not spilling out of receptacles?
- Consider time for proper hygiene.
  - Do you have time in the schedule for everyone to wash their hands before eating? If time is too short, does food have to be served? Can you serve food items that do not have to be touched, such as a banana and pudding cup and spoon, instead of cookies and mandarins.
- Consider a new greeting.
  - Do you routinely shake hands at your event? Can you invent a new greeting? The kids might enjoy coming up with a silly new way to say hello that does not involve touching!
- Consider having tissues available.

- Bring a box of tissues so anyone sneezing or coughing has a way to catch those germs. Then send them home if it is due to an illness.
- Consider how you open doors.
  - Doorknobs are one of the worst places to touch. Scan the space and think about which doors can be propped open so not everyone needs to touch it. Or if it's too cold, can you have someone be the greeter and open the door for everyone.
  - Make sure paper towels and a garbage are available my bathroom doors, so that you can open the door with a towel, and then throw it away.
- Consider your activities.
  - Will you be doing a game that requires close physical contact? Maybe save that for your July meeting instead. Choose ice breakers that do not require physical touch between participants during highly infectious seasons.
- Consider your risk outside of meetings.
  - Germs are picked up everywhere. Did you just buy supplies at Target for your event? Consider using a tissue on your fingertip so you don't need to touch the PIN pad when paying. Be sure to wipe down the cart handle, and if a plastic produce bag is available, use that as an added layer between you and the handle. Pumping gas? Grab a paper towel from the window cleaning station and use that to hold the gas handle. Grabbing something to eat while you run these errands? Remember that tables are not disinfected between customers, so don't let your food or utensils touch the table. Put them on napkins or plates.
- Consider having back-up volunteers in place.
  - Oftentimes parents will bring a sick child with them to an event when they are committed to volunteering. This is well-intentioned, but should be discouraged. To avoid gaps in help, be sure to add a few more volunteers to your roster for each activity to plan for absences.
- Consider moving activities outside.
  - Open air reduces the risk of airborne illness. Can you take your meeting outside, or even just part of it?
- Consider post-meeting clean-up.
  - If hosting a project meeting in your home, how will you disinfect afterwards? Plan to take fifteen minutes after everyone has left to wipe down all frequently touched surfaces with a disinfectant spray or bleach solution.
- Consider shared educational resources.
  - Will you be passing around something cool for the children to see? Maybe for now consider walking around with it and showing them at eye level, without the need for them to touch it.
  - Are you passing around papers? Instead of the take-one-and-pass-it-along method, try handing them out one at a time.
  - Will there be only one pair of shears, or camera, or glue bottle, etc for everyone to use? Can you use some disinfectant wipes between use, or at least a few times throughout the activity?
- Consider shared pens and pencils.
  - Does everyone use the same pen to check in for attendance? Can you have one person do this so not everyone is touching the same pen?

*Marcel Horowitz*

Marcel Horowitz, MS, MCHES  
 Healthy Youth, Families, and Communities Advisor  
 University of California Cooperative Extension, Yolo County