INFECTION PREVENTION
4-H Healthy Meeting Action Steps

OUR GOAL
During any public health emergency, it is important that we all take a little extra time to increase sanitary practices at 4-H gatherings. Not only will this help prevent the spread of illness but is a wonderful opportunity to educate youth and adults about proper healthy hygiene and social responsibility for ourselves and the community around us. Our goal is to provide resources to assist you in reducing the risk of inadvertently spreading disease at your 4-H meetings and events.

ACTION STEPS
This factsheet will provide some common sense steps that can be taken to help reduce risks at 4-H gatherings. Many of the steps listed below are meant to reduce the amount of touching of shared items by multiple individuals. We encourage you to put into practice those steps that make the most sense for your particular situation. It is not our goal to panic 4-Hers but rather to equip them with the resources necessary to be better educated and prepared to practice good hygiene habits. Most of these items are small changes in behavior that can lead to improved health and safety in communal settings.

PROPER HYGIENE HABITS
It cannot be stated enough how important proper handwashing is for preventing the spread of germs and disease. Washing your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds is recommended. Here are some hygiene related things to keep in mind at your 4-H meetings/gatherings.

♦ Provide time in your schedule for everyone to wash their hands before eating or after coming into contact with any potentially contaminated surfaces.
♦ Use paper towels for drying hands rather than a cloth towel that is being used by multiple individuals. Use the paper towel to open bathroom doors or other surfaces that are touched repeatedly.
♦ Invent new ways for participants to greet one another instead of shaking hands. Allow the 4-Hers to come up with silly ways to say hello that does not require touching.
♦ Scan for barriers into your meeting space. Consider if there are doors that can be propped open so they are not being touched by everyone entering the room. If that is not possible, is there one person who can serve as the greeter opening the door for everyone else so only one person is in contact with the surface?
♦ Does everyone normally sign in with a shared pen? Consider having one person be in charge of this so not everyone is touching the same pen.
♦ At the end of the meeting plan to take time after everyone has left to wipe down frequently touched surfaces with a proper disinfectant product.
♦ Minimize activities that require physical touch between participants as much as possible during highly infectious seasons.
♦ Open air reduces the risk of airborne illness. Is it possible to move at least part of your meetings outdoors?
♦ Try to limit the number of shared materials used during meetings. This could include scissors, glue, tape, etc. If these items must be used, consider having one person be in charge of that item. If that is impractical, try to use some type of disinfectant wipe between uses as much as possible.
HEALTHY FOOD ETIQUETTE

The majority of 4-H gatherings involve some type of snack being served to those in attendance. Here are some useful tips to keep in mind if you are serving any food or beverages at your 4-H meetings.

- If you are using serving utensils to distribute food have one person serve everyone rather than having multiple hands touching the serving utensils.
- Consider serving snacks in single serve packaging. Another option is to have one leader put the snack in small cups/containers before snack is served so they are being handled by only one person rather than touched by the entire group.
- This same procedure goes for beverages that are served from a gallon container or large push button cooler. Designate an individual to be in charge of filling cups that can be distributed to everyone else. You may want to also consider serving individual juice boxes, etc.
- Provide sufficient containers to collect the increased garbage insuring that items which have been touched and licked are properly disposed of.
- You want to insure the least number of hands are touching food and drink items before they reach someone’s mouth.
- Make sure that anyone who will be touching any food item is practicing proper hand washing and other healthy hygiene techniques prior to being in contact with food or beverage items.

MINIMIZING RISK FACTORS

In order to keep the entire group healthy, it is sometimes necessary to remove sick individuals and other risk factors from the environment. Here are some things to keep in mind when trying to provide the safest environment for 4-H members and their families.

- Relax attendance policies during times of high infection risk. If a 4-Her is sick, they should by excused from participating. The absence should not count against club attendance policies. Nobody should feel that they need to attend a meeting if they are sick or at risk for an illness.
- If someone does come to a meeting with obvious symptoms, they should be encouraged to return home so as not to infect the rest of the group. Insure that they will be welcomed back to the group without penalty when they are once again healthy.
- Consider having back-up adult volunteers in place to assist with meetings. Oftentimes committed volunteers will feel like they need to be at a meeting even though they should not be due to a health issue. Again they should be encouraged to stay away while they are sick and welcomed back when they return to full health.
- If there is a sick individual within the home where meetings normally take place, consider an alternate location or cancel that meeting altogether to insure that participants are not exposed to a potential contagion.

With an awareness of proper practices we can insure that we are taking steps to minimize exposure to infectious agents. By making simple changes in our behaviors we can have considerable impacts on the health of all our 4-H members and our 4-H meeting environments.

Edited by Marc L Cournoyer,
UConn Extension 4-H Program Administrator

Adapted from “Coronavirus Update. 3/10/20” by Marcel Horowitz, MS, MCHES
Healthy Youth, Families & Communities Advisor
University of California Cooperative Extension